"[G]irlish Passion and Vanity"[1]:

Female Alterity and Sympathy in George Eliot's Fiction

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[1] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (Penguin Books, 2008), p. 364.

Acknowledgements

Though I still feel like this thesis is merely a modest, necessarily incomplete, and in many ways flawed piece of work, it would be incredibly remiss not to thank everyone who has provided me the opportunity to produce something I am nonetheless proud of, if for no other reason than that I believe it isn't mine alone. Thanks to every single person for your love and support.

Thanks to Katarina for your friendship, for your always thoughtful comments, and for your kind reassurances that none of this was ever as bad as I had thought.

Thanks to my parents and family, who have always supported me through school and beyond. Without their continual help and support, none of my achievements would have been possible. It is impossible to ever truly repay the gift of education, so I can only hope that what I do and accomplish from here always makes you proud and shows my love.

Thanks to Professor MacDuffie, who taught me that my voice and opinions mattered when I didn't believe it myself, and who introduced me to George Eliot and her incalculably rich fiction for the first time in the spring of 2019. That is an introduction which has changed my life irrevocably for the better and which I will never forget.

Thanks to Professor MacKay, who has been constantly encouraging, challenging, and supporting me and my academic endeavors throughout the last year. Both as a professor and thesis advisor, you have fostered both my love and respect for Eliot and my self-confidence in my work more than I could have ever anticipated. Even though our working relationship is now over, I will truly never forget your kindness or wisdom.

And finally, thanks to George Eliot herself, who, while she will clearly never read this, still deserves acknowledgement for giving me what I hope to be a lifelong appreciation for the little dignities and wonders of every human life that we find everywhere in our daily lives if we only know how and where to look. I doubt we will ever see an author again who, though so venerated herself, never stopped venerating and revealing the common person's struggles, triumphs, and great loves in such awe-inspiring detail.

Abstract

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Title: "[G]irlish Passion and Vanity": Female Alterity and Sympathy in George Eliot's Fiction

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My thesis seeks to complicate the conventional critical understanding of George Eliot's conception of sympathy within her novels. Namely, I challenge the assumption that sympathy in Eliot's work is always a mutually beneficial process between and/or among individuals and that it always arises from a true psychic merging of perspectives and feelings. To do so, I have taken several of Eliot's female characters that are often deemed unsympathetic by critics and readers – Hetty Sorrel of *Adam Bede*, Rosamond Vincy of *Middlemarch*, and Gwendolen Harleth of *Daniel Deronda* – and read them through feminist and narratological methodologies to show how sympathy is actually formed and enacted within these novels by the recognition that there is an inherent psychic alterity and distance between people and their various perspectives, a process of recognition which these particular female characters acutely demonstrate, model, and perform. Understanding that these characters represent a valid means and complication of sympathy throughout Eliot's canon is thus necessary not only to amend our incomplete assessments of their morality and textual importance within specific novels but also to sufficiently refine and clarify the various implications that women and their roles within Eliot's fiction have on her literary, moral, and sociopolitical ethos more generally.

I. Introducing George Eliot and the Feminine Mind

As an author, intellectual, and woman, George Eliot was in her own lifetime and remains to this day an institution unto herself. And yet, recognizing the remarkable nature of her life and accomplishments is still thrown into relief by what Nancy Henry terms "her own invisible, counter-factual life – lived out as a housewife and mother . . . never having reached London and the intellectual and professional opportunities it provided" (Henry 16). The "counter-factual life" Henry identifies is all the more useful to consider Eliot's work and life through because Eliot herself seemed keenly aware of that possibility, as the women in her life (through no fault of their own, it should be remarked) faced particularly gendered challenges to the potential for autonomy in their lives. Her mother, for instance, "was often too ill . . . even to attend church" (44), let alone find an identity outside of her family. Her sister (and her sister's marriage), meanwhile, served as "a sad model, as she was perpetually pregnant and her husband was on the verge of bankruptcy," a husband who footed his bills by borrowing directly from Chrissey's own inheritance (57). In short, "[t]here was no reason for Mary Ann," as young Eliot was then known, "to think that she could fashion a career outside of marriage or that she could become a scholar" (44). The fact that she did indeed accomplish both those goals is phenomenal in and of itself, and perhaps supports more profoundly than any other of her later ideas "that character and selfhood are partly determined in relation to others" (Henry and Levine 10) and that the greatest scenes of human triumph and tragedy came from "an acceptance of the ordinary and of limitation" as typified by the small Midlands towns of her novels (9). Her consistent dedication to realism throughout her career was not just a narrative choice but "a moral project" bound in "representing and dramatizing the value of the ordinary" (6).

A key caveat to this "moral project," bound as it is in Eliot's escape from the ordinary lives she repeatedly espoused in her novels, is that "[g]etting it right was no simple matter of recording external fact, but was a case of being capable of the most complete possible honesty by opening mind and feelings to otherness . . ." (8). This insight combined with the fact that individuals in her works can "only be understood *in relation to* the social complex and the larger movements of history" (10, emphasis original) meant that "the rebellious impulse that led George Eliot to the special qualities of her art, had conservative consequences, and even entailed a rejection in her fiction" of her own "risk-taking career" (11). This is a premise which Henry elucidates further on her own in *The Life of George Eliot*, elucidating especially in *The Mill on the Floss*' Maggie and *Middlemarch*'s Dorothea how "Eliot clearly infused aspects of herself into both characters . . ." (Henry 43) and demonstrated through them that "early nineteenth-century society offered no outlet for the energies of ardent young women . . ." (43). Ironically, then, "Eliot was able to write their stories only because she found a way out of the restrictions imposed on women and those growing up in provincial society generally" (43). This is the key irony and the key tension I argue we must first understand if one is to understand how gender influences our readings of Eliot's sympathy, works, and life as a whole. Feminist critiques that fault Eliot for never creating a heroine like herself who could resist "the conventions of society" (Henry and Levine 10) ignore the key ideological connections between her life, realism, and attitudes about gender that Henry and Levine have so concisely identified above, though I will not deny that such concerns are still captivating.

Indeed, I think that feminist criticism and I have much more in common in our approaches to Eliot than first meets the eye, especially considering I've yet to raise the question of sympathy at all. Even though it may be a source of disappointment that no characters like

Eliot emerge in her fiction, the way (and indeed the only way) we articulate that disappointment is through analyzing characters who are unlike her. Where we shall differ, however, is that I, in further developing those connections between realism, gender, and sympathy which I hinted at previously, will go further to analyze characters who we might argue have no hint of the "sage" in them at all. It is one thing to sense the tragedy in a Dorothea or a Maggie, female characters who seem to more closely align with Henry's idea of Eliot's "counter-factual life," but it is entirely another to see how Eliot uses the Hetty's and Rosamond's of the world to invoke those same questions of what women are capable of and what they deserve from their communities, from Eliot's contemporary readers, and from readers of today. The clearest example of how Eliot's "profoundest interests lay," and developed, "with women who had hopes and aspirations beyond the conventional, women who wanted to achieve things, however vague, who were impatient of the aims usually attributed to them" and who were "symbolic of the deeper stirrings and frustrations of women's life in general" (Calder 126) is her now famous essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,"[1] which she published anonymously in the *Westminster Review* in 1856 ("Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," *British Library*). Not yet adopting her famous male pseudonym or persona, it would seem tempting to therefore read Eliot as instead performing and assuming an androgynous or even outright genderless role in her critical writing and aligning herself with a paradoxically "desexualized" *and* "masculine" tradition (Stern 476) in what appears to be a scathing critique of (what we now know to be) her own sex.

And yet, like most things concerning Eliot, this is surely not the entire picture. More so than perhaps any of her other early essays, "Silly Novels" discreetly yet assuredly melds what will become the central relationship this thesis elucidates: that between gender and sympathy.

[1] First appeared in the October 1856 edition of *The Westminster Review*; The quoted sections found here are from *The Essays of George Eliot*, edited by Nathan Sheppard (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883), pp. 178-204.

In doing so, I argue that we must reread this essay as expressing, or at the very least predicating, a foundationally gendered conception of sympathy in order to fully understand the female characters of Eliot's canon, and then that canon itself in turn. Towards that end, before we explore the ways in which "Silly Novels" provides a foundation for a specific kind of gendered sympathy, it is necessary to first provide a generalized and working definition of Eliot's sympathy at all. Though perhaps a surprisingly contentious topic in its own right, sympathy for Eliot, as Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth states simply, "lies near the heart of moral life" (Ermarth 23). Beyond a mere literary or intellectual exercise, sympathy for Eliot does and should serve as the practical and ideological standard on which one's life is based. As such, it connects with her other identified moral project of realism, which depended upon "a kind of authenticity, an honest representation of one's own feelings and perceptions" (Henry and Levine 6). The key caveat to this "kind of authenticity," of course, is that neither realism nor sympathy on their own imply genuine connectedness between two or more people. Indeed, as Ermarth shows, it implies just the opposite. Sympathy is not the "selfless benevolence" that its colloquial meaning suggests but acts and states of being "that involve a difficult psychic negotiation between self and other" (Ermarth 23). Those acts not only require "double consciousness" and "self-division" within an individual but must also be "preceded by the recognition of difference: between oneself and another, or between the differing impulses of one's own complex motivation" (25).

Most critically for our specifically gendered analysis, Ermarth notes how Eliot "was fond of quoting Comte to the effect that our true destiny is composed of resignation and activity" (26), a fact which rejects as a result visions of life that disregard "the hard, unaccommodating actual." Instead, "[o]nly vision that respects actuality can create order and form" (26), and therefore sympathy in turn, for the individuals, communities, and societies who create, maintain, and rely

upon those visions for their identities. For Eliot, "actuality" signals a world in which "separateness, difference necessarily precedes unity since what does not differ cannot be joined." In this way, "the double action of differentiation and unification, of sympathy and self-expression" (26) that Eliot espouses and develops allows her in turn to link her conservative, realist values and sympathetic ideology under a unified literary identity and body of work. This understanding now allows us to respond to critics who read Eliot as using a male pseudonym and narrative voice both to align herself with some sort of patriarchal privilege for her own gain and, having attained that success, to deny that same position of power to the category of women to which she belongs. Seeing sympathy as just as much a psychic altercation between the facets of one's own identity as it is one among distinct individuals, Eliot's career, originating and hinging upon as it did from a similar altercation between her female "reality" and (arguably) male persona, in fact makes the sympathy for which she is so celebrated possible at all. If Eliot had refused to undertake that process and had aligned herself more publicly and vocally with her own sex, it is likely both that the novels and characters as we know them today would not exist and that real, practical limitations placed on her and other female authors by society would have prevented her from writing at all. Eliot's reasons for choosing her male pseudonym during her debut into fiction came both from a refusal to be condescended to, as so many other female novelists were, as well as out of a desire to defend her "respectability" and to distance herself from her anonymous non-fiction works (Henry and Levine 4).

I make this digression to mark how Eliot from the very start seemed to have identified and even sourced the tension and alterity she considered so necessary for sympathy within fiction from her particularly gendered experiences as an emerging novelist. It hardly could have escaped her attention, for example, that the "inevitable backlash of gossip and rumor" she, Lewes, and

her publisher Blackwood were so desperate to avoid and which made her pseudonym necessary was only necessary as such because the burden of "that difficult social fact" of her relationship with Lewes (Bodenheimer 29) fell squarely on her shoulders as a woman, while male intellectuals in her own social circles consorted relatively freely with mistresses and other "comparable liaisons" (Henry 54-58, 65-68). Despite her best efforts, however, the Marian Evans who lived with a married man and George Eliot the intellectual became inexorably linked (though perhaps not quite as besmirched as feared) early in the public eye in the wake of the publication of *Adam Bede* (1859), when she, Lewes, and Blackwood were forced to respond to several men falsely claiming to be its author. Besides serving as a "harrowing" entry into public life, this episode also deepened Eliot's sensitivity to and awareness of an "uncontrollable power of gossip and rumor in the literary marketplace," as well as forcing Eliot to once again reckon with her relationship to the past and to her many contributing influences (Bodenheimer 29-30). As such, it can hardly escape our attention now that it was this uniquely feminine burden to Eliot's literary and social reputation (and to her identity) which made her career possible at all. This success, only superficially at the expense of apparently abandoning and deriding her own sex, instead more concretely aligns with the gendered conflicts with which Eliot had to contend.

Therefore, I would argue that instead of an abandonment or derision, Eliot's approach to her authorial identity and to women within her fiction is a direct response to the very real societal conditions which created her. Eliot was clearly not successful in hiding her identity for long. This fact, combined with her lifelong commitment to realism, seems to have pushed her into an entirely different approach. Eliot's subsequent novel *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), for example, is her most clearly autobiographical up to that point, and many read its protagonist Maggie as paying with her life for daring to expect an education or to love whom she wants within her

stifling provincial community.[2] However, even this apparently cruel and convention-driven treatment has a double reading. Indeed, when Eliot appears to treat her female characters as she and their communities expect, she actually reaffirms her commitment to refuse to diminish them. Their lives and choices are not only tolerated but often take center stage, and their struggles originate not from their own moral or social "misdeeds" but from the refusal of society to accept difference within its ranks. Further still, these female characters, in their alienation, increasingly come to represent and predicate the very sympathy which their communities refuse them. In other words, Eliot's approach to her own conception of femininity and to women in fiction more generally reflects and elucidates in various forms and settings the same process of alterity, tension, and distance which Eliot elsewhere faced herself and then explicitly connected with her broader sympathetic and realist project. Eliot's position within society may have necessitated that she divided herself into pieces and be at odds with herself, but Eliot then decided, in her typical fashion, that she would set the terms, and that such internal tension could be repurposed (and even should be) to underpin our relationships to ourselves, to one another, and to our broader communities.

Restated simply, Eliot's conception of sympathy with which we now consider it necessary to approach her fiction and characters originates from the very process of dissimulation which others have argued hinders or even prohibits that sympathy. Further still, this dissimulation, this fracturing of the self between one's self and among one's self and others, is necessarily gendered because it is necessarily connected to Eliot's apparent distancing of

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[2] Having said as much, *The Mill on the Floss* and Maggie Tulliver are unfortunately outside the scope of this thesis. While many critics read Maggie and her fate as a feminist failure on Eliot's part, Maggie is still overwhelmingly seen as a sympathetic character, both in the sense that is likeable and pitiable and in the sense that Eliot herself clearly seems to identity with her – though I will challenge how necessary identification is to sympathy very soon. Even the intense anger she feels towards others because of the cultural and emotional limits placed on her as a woman is often read as a justifiable outrage, garnering more sympathy for her cause than it takes away.

herself both from a personal concept of femininity and from a broader societal concept of femininity which stressed a defanged and placid sorority with other women on the sole basis on sex. It is with irony, then, that critics who praise Eliot for the ways in which she anchors her heroines "in 'normal' society" and reveals through them "humanity, history and the needs and wants of women in general" (Calder 126) also bemoan that:

> [S]he does not commit herself fully to the energies and aspirations she lets loose in these women. Does she not cheat them, and cheat us, ultimately, in allowing them so little? Does she not excite our interest through the breadth and the challenge of the implications of her fiction, and then deftly damn up and fence round the momentum she has so powerfully created? (158)

We give Eliot far too little credit if we act as if she herself was not aware of the complicated implications of gender, sympathy, and selfhood she embroiled herself in and which her own social and intellectual advancements relied upon. Indeed, I think Ermarth's definition of Eliot's sympathy (as well as others to be explored) shows very acutely how aware Eliot was, however implicitly, of that "counter-factual life" Henry exposed, and how that shaped her ideology, fiction, and characters in turn.

From that premise, we turn now to my argument that we not only *can* but *should* read Eliot's female characters, even and especially the ones she denies her own unconventional and seemingly gender-transcendent life to, as the ultimate expression of what Deirdre David calls "compelling conflicts between the desires of intelligent women for autonomy and a male authority seeking to govern such desires . . ." (David 162). In that light, even apparently unsympathetic female characters and their unsatisfying endings are also expressions of the ways in which "irreconcilable conflicts threaten formal coherence," whether on the level of a page or

of a society. Eliot limits her female characters in the way society demands, managing the tension they create within their respective communities and novels "by relegating to another place . . . what is incoherent, contradictory, even intolerable" (163). In other words, distancing us from the "problem" of unmanageable, unknowable, and unsympathetic women by placing them in the realm of fiction is precisely how Eliot reinforces their sense of self and our sense of sympathy towards them. She strengthens their force of control over their sense of self, their narratives, and how others interpret those narratives where she seems most to deny it. Unsympathetic female characters, then, are sympathetic after all by virtue of the very distance Eliot places between herself and them, and places between them and us. The unsympathetic woman, in failing to conform in one way or another to societal expectations of them and apparently punished by the text for doing so, is actually the means by which Eliot forces us to reconsider literary and societal standards of sympathy for women as a whole.

Having said that, it is important now to prove exactly how (and where) that reconsideration is made possible. The clearest foundation of this relationship between gender, realism, and sympathy rests and emerges in the previously introduced "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists." Eliot begins by identifying these "silly novels" as being grouped together under "a genus with many species, determined by the particular quality of silliness that predominates them – the frothy, the prosy, the pious, or the pedantic," the bulk of these being "a composite of feminine fatuity" called "the *mind-and millinery* species" (Eliot 178, emphasis original). From the essay's beginning, Eliot's critical base lies in sarcastically detailing all the various virtues of these novels' heroines, whose noses and morals "are alike free from any tendency to irregularity" and who "have a depth of insight that looks through and through the shallow theories of philosophers . . . [H]er superior instincts are a sort of dial by which men have only to set their

clocks and watches, and all will go well" (178-79). Such silliness continues on in earnest when Eliot describes these heroines' privilege of resting their "fainting form[s] . . . on the very best upholstery" (179), which she uses to segue into a realistic and sympathetic concern. Silly novels and their preposterously perfect protagonists, Eliot argues, have been excused for far too long not on the basis of their merit but on the basis that all female novelists were supposed to be writing "because they had no other 'ladylike' means of getting their bread" (180). While this premise means that "vacillating syntax, and improbable incident had a certain pathos for us" (180), such pathos turns out to be entirely unfounded on account of the fact that:

> The fair writers have evidently never talked to a tradesman except from a carriage window; they have no notion of the working-classes except as "dependents;" they think five hundred a year a miserable pittance; Belgravia and "baronial halls" are their primary truths; and they have no idea of feeling interest in any man who is not at least a great landed proprietor, if not a prime minister. It is clear that they write in elegant boudoirs, with violet-colored ink and a ruby pen; that they must be entirely indifferent to publishers' accounts, and inexperienced in every form of poverty except poverty of brains . . . If their peers and peeresses are improbable, their literary men, tradespeople, and cottagers are impossible; and their intellect seems to have the peculiar impartiality of reproducing both what they *have* seen and heard, and what they have *not* seen and heard, with equal unfaithfulness. (180-81, emphasis original)

I have quoted this section at length because, although Eliot is dealing primarily here with that specific "mind-and-millinery" species of novel and author, I think it neatly encapsulates and emphasizes the implicit distinction she sets forth between women who write "silly" novels and those who do not. Despite taking a position of great emphasis in the title of this essay, critics

(especially feminist critics) have often taken this adjective "silly" to signify that George Eliot was "calling all novels written by women 'silly'" and that, accordingly, Eliot was attempting to align herself with not just men in general but intellectual men, "berating women who have not had similar intellectual opportunities" (Tush 1). As this section illustrates, little could be further from the truth about Eliot's intentions and attitudes. Instead, Eliot makes it clear that she criticizes the female authors that she does because they, insulated from the real world in this case by their primarily financially privileged positions, are ironically all the less able to produce the proper distance between people necessary for sympathy. In their ignorance of the world, they are only able to recreate it from their own experience, which will always be woefully incomplete and unsympathetic as long as it stems from a singular psyche contending with nothing but itself, hence the "equal unfaithfulness" in representing events even in their own lives. They are unsympathetic not by virtue of their lifestyles in and of themselves, nor even because of their rather selfish and flippant attitudes in and of themselves, but because they have taken the difficult psychic intellectual work and distance between individuals Eliot identified as necessary for sympathy and refashioned it as a privilege belonging to their caste and in so doing have perverted the very purpose of literature in Eliot's eyes. It is not against the sympathetic project to be limited to one's own worldview; sympathy, in fact, requires recognizing such limitations and the reality of others' alterity. It is, however, against the sympathetic project to be limited to one's own worldview and not even know it, and once knowing it, to uphold that distance so that the lives of one's fellow man (and woman) can be diminished as merely a stage prop to one's own.

In this light, Eliot's particular focus on female authors (rather than simply unprivileged and unsympathetic authors of all genders) emerges from the fact that "she is demanding more serious critical attention to, and thus higher standards for, female fiction" demands which reveal

"her constant efforts to expand the roles of women in fiction . . . without lapsing into the historically inauthentic escapism of many of her female colleagues" (Tush 4). This revulsion to inauthenticity was also elucidated in the previously quoted passage, but now takes on a particularly gendered tinge. For another example, Eliot draws our attention to *The Enigma,* a work of the oracular species. These kinds of novels, like the prototype Eliot drags into the spotlight, are generally "bent on edifying periphrases" (Eliot 190) and somehow both diminish the value of ordinary experiences and raise them to the heights of "sanguinary melodrama" (191) with their elevated sense of style. While Eliot would almost surely agree that the stories of "quite modern drawing-room society" that these novels depict would be worth telling and even must be told, she again states (more explicitly this time) that novels like "The Enigma" and other "silly novels" written by women suffer from a "confusion of purpose which is so characteristic" of them, failing both themselves and the subjects they depict in turn (192-93). These novels pervert the necessary distance between individuals with a kind of ignorant and inescapable didacticism, chiefly because their authors typically belong to a class of "certain ladies who think that an amazing ignorance . . . is the best possible qualification for forming an opinion on the knottiest moral and speculative questions" (188). In other words, these novels do not fail just because they attempt to reckon with moral and societal problems from a privileged perspective. Indeed, as we have explored previously at length, it could be argued that Eliot often did so herself. Instead, they fail because their "characters, and incidents, and traits of manners introduced . . . are mere shreds from the most heterogeneous romances" (193). Rather than using their novels with their domestic plots as attempts to comment on and rectify, for instance, the limits of female education and financial freedom outside of marriage, these female authors clothe themselves in a societally backed comfort. Secure in the ignorance they have been taught to desire, these female authors

only care for questions of morality, sympathy, or societal change as mere backdrops to their own insulated parlors and unsympathetic worldviews. This, Eliot argues, is "the most mischievous form of feminine silliness . . . because it tends to confirm the popular prejudice against the more solid education of women" (194), namely the idea that women do not *need* nor *deserve* more education than they already have when they accomplish both too much and too little with it.

Tush expands upon this idea, noting that Eliot similarly believed that "many inferior women writers are kept from developing . . . necessary self-criticism because they are extravagantly and unduly praised by male critics" (Tush 5). Eliot herself writes that, "[n]o sooner does a woman show that she has genius of effective talent, than she receives the tribute of being moderately praised and severely criticised" (Eliot 202) and that "the average intellect of women is unfairly represented by the mass of feminine literature . . . [s]o that, after all, the severe critics are fulfilling a chivalrous duty in depriving the mere fact of feminine authorship of any false prestige . . ." (202-3). Eliot's implication here, Tush argues, is that "through their criticism, male critics control the quality of female literary production by praising what is bad and condemning what is good" (Tush 6). In other words, it serves only the interests of men and of the society which otherwise demeans women's efforts at equality in the public sphere to suffer female writers who position themselves as the champion of women's intellectualism and independence while signifying just the opposite. Harsher criticism, it could be argued, could also be used as a patriarchal tool of silencing. However, it is only a "mixed blessing of indelicate but equal treatment" (Tush 6) for both male and female writers that could even attempt to neutralize such a disparity. Returning to the question of alterity and distance in sympathy, it could even be argued that Eliot's "awareness of the difference in critical standards for male and female writers may

help to explain why she not only chose a male pseudonym but also hid behind a male narrative voice in her early works" (Tush 6).

With that in mind, it is now quite safe for us to argue that Eliot was not interested in "betraying and transcending her sex and gender," nor in maintaining a "sagacious, cool presence peculiarly untainted by the vulgar business of the world" (David 165), especially not in the pursuit of distancing herself from her own femininity (Calder 126, 158). Eliot quite literally made it her business to be greatly concerned with the everyday business of the world and with the everyday people who inhabited it, whether or not they met our standards of what gender or sympathetic understanding, for instance, should look or function like. Clearly, Eliot took her position as a female author and its implications seriously, and we can now be secure in the knowledge that her complicated career with all its equally complicated internal and external gendered conflicts placed her in a unique position to make us consider how similar conflicts irrevocably change the way we view her novels and the communities and worlds they depict. With that said and with the work of describing Eliot herself now at its natural conclusion, we turn back now to fully expand upon the concern which has been implicit throughout this introduction. What, exactly, do we (and *should* we) make of her female characters? Stated more specifically, what exactly do we make of the female characters who are so unlike Eliot herself and who, in fact, seem to have been taken almost directly from the vain, selfish, ignorant women she decried so thoroughly in "Silly Novels"?

I stated previously that apparently unsympathetic female characters[3] are sympathetic by virtue of the distance Eliot places between herself and them and also by virtue of the distance she places between them and us, the readers. My focus is on unsympathetic *female* characters in

[3] By naming them unsympathetic female characters, I maintain both that the text itself ostensibly encourages readers' lack of sympathy towards them and that they themselves are unsympathetic towards others in those texts.

particular because they, as Eliot's own life demonstrated, face the most outright disdain, censure, and even death within their respective novels on what I argue is fundamentally the basis of sex. Whether that basis of sex is because they stray too far from feminine conventions or align too closely with them, however, will vary based on the novel and character being discussed. Ultimately, however, we will see more acutely and directly in the following chapters how Eliot actually makes these characters the forces for sympathy they are, and how they as a result then force us to reconsider the very methods, appearances, and purposes of sympathy. Women such as these are used to being watched, but now they force us to gaze upon and reckon with ourselves.

The formation of this argument takes shape by following the chronology of Eliot's works, beginning with an analysis and discussion of Hetty Sorrel within *Adam Bede* (1859). Within this chapter, I am primarily concerned with elucidating the extent to which Hetty is narratively distanced from her fellow characters, the narrator, and even the text itself, and how this distance produces alterity – one of the foremost conditions necessary for sympathy within the novel. Hetty maintains a psychic distance between these elements of the novel through her and the narrator's persistent emphasis on her sense of self being insulated from and necessarily contrary to others. Beyond just distance, Hetty also relies on the concept of alterity to produce sympathy. Alterity in this chapter is defined as the active recognition and cultivation of the inaccessibility of the other and of the other's mind, which Hetty primarily achieves through her selfish, vain, and unsympathetic view of the world. I call upon Helena Michie's insights within her book *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* to establish that this distance and alterity is located on the narrative level of the text itself, living primarily in descriptions of female characters which are simultaneously creative and destructive. As such, recognizing and elucidating the distance and alterity that Hetty produces is not a mere interesting complication to

her character but an entirely necessary process to undertake if we are to appropriately define Eliot's sympathetic project within the novel as a whole. What Hetty ultimately demonstrates is that one's identity is not just separate from others but irrevocably so, meaning any attempts to forge conventional sympathetic connections based in "fellow-feeling" and benevolence will be inherently self-defeating. Instead, we must redefine Eliot's sympathy as a continuation of the tension between perspectives that Hetty herself demonstrates and perpetuates. As a result, she not only becomes sympathetic herself by maintaining a staunch interiority and alterity separate from the narrator and readers, but also models sympathy for the novel as a whole.

Rosamond takes sympathy's reliance on alterity that Hetty first puts forward to an even further extreme, not only demonstrating and representing sympathy within her respective novel *Middlemarch* (1871-72) but also becoming the very means of its creation and continuation. Her inability to see into others' minds or recognize herself there ultimately allows her to elevate her own voice to be that of a narrator complementary with Eliot's own. In this third chapter, I mark Rosamond's progress in transforming from mere character to narrator. This progression occurs because Rosamond embraces her alterity from the rest of the novel and its characters, considering them as part of her own larger story instead of as sympathetic individuals and narratives in their own right. I rely on Rae Greiner's article "Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel" to make this argument, whose most salient points for our consideration are that the sympathetic process requires separation between people rather than identification and that sympathy itself is a conscious and repeated effort rather than a state of being. Where I differ from Greiner, however, is in arguing that Rosamond's assimilation of other minds into her own is a productive source of sympathy rather than a threat to it, primarily because it maintains her distinct sense of self and her power as a narrator. She maintains the link

between sympathy and discrete individuality where others cannot. I also apply Charlie Tyson's argument in "'A Being Apart': Sympathy and Distance in *Middlemarch*" about the disjunction between sympathy's expected result, increased intimacy between people, and its actual result, reduced intimacy, to Rosamond's and Lydgate's relationship, where Rosamond gains her more complete narrative authority over the story thus far due to her unsympathetic outlook. In this way, lack of sympathy is actually the means by which Eliot links Rosamond's narrative authority to its broader sympathetic ideology. Rather than threatening sympathy entirely, Rosamond's separation from and connection to the novel makes it possible for her to enact the new limited kind of sympathy that is possible in *Middlemarch*.

In our final novel under consideration, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), we come to see how Gwendolen Harleth represents a continuation and synthesis of the elements in the previous heroines and novels – namely Hetty's sense of alterity and Rosamond's use of narrative control. Here, I am particularly concerned with showing how Eliot reshapes the questions of sympathy which remained largely conceptual in the previous novels by manifesting them in Gwendolen's often contentious interactions with the people, communities, and social institutions that surround her in a much more familiar and contemporary Victorian context than before. I first analyze Henry James's critique of the novel, "*Daniel Deronda*: A Conversation," to provide a basis for how the novel and Gwendolen herself were contemporarily received and thus for my argument as a whole. His language of the "universe" exerting itself on Gwendolen is a useful counterpoint to consider the ways in which Gwendolen, in turn, shapes her environment and her novel due to her lack of sympathy for others. Her psychic conflicts increasingly have physical referents and origins outside of herself, most visibly in her contentious relationships to other women and in her navigation of two of the limited social positions available to women: marriage and widowhood.

Riya Das in her article "An Unsympathetic Network: Female Defiance as Narrative Force in *Daniel Deronda*" provides a critical link between women's unsympathetic connections to one another and their competitive social circumstances. Her argument that antagonism between women drives their chance at success, rather than cooperation, supports and complicates my own analysis that Gwendolen's selfishness and inability to sympathize with others is primarily a product and means of self-preservation, rather than some isolated moral deficiency. Applying Catherine A. Civello's article "The Ironies of Widowhood: Displacement of Marriage in the Fiction of George Eliot" further complicates this position, as she articulates, using the language of irony, how Gwendolen's widowhood in its new apparent social and emotional isolation actually allows her more sympathetic possibilities than in marriage. I take her conclusion that Eliot uses irony in this way to subvert Victorian cultural assumptions about marriage and gender in order to argue further that Gwendolen's engagements with sympathy only fail when they are bound too closely to unchallenged misogynistic conventions of both *Daniel Deronda*'s and Eliot's own world – and that Gwendolen and her fraught journey through the modes of sympathy and human connection available to her represents Eliot's attempts to fashion new and improved means of sympathy only made possible by challenging the structures they both had to contend and struggle with to initially form it at all. Ultimately, *Daniel Deronda* insists that increasingly complicated forms of inter- and intrapersonal conflict, and therefore of sympathy, are necessary to navigate the increasingly complicated social, political, and moral worlds Eliot's readers are moving within.

II. *Adam Bede* and Hetty Sorrel:

The Beauty and Sympathy in "a False Air of Innocence"[4]

Though all of Eliot's unsympathetic female characters face their fair share of criticism (both of the scholarly kind and otherwise) for their lack of sympathy towards others, few seem to be as outrightly reviled for it as is Hetty Sorrel. What also seems to be unique to Hetty Sorrel is the extent to which, given her characterization, critics argue that her fate is the only possible one, that Eliot's narrator, seemingly always identified as masculine, has not only made possible but even *demanded* Hetty's suffering as a narrative and moral requirement for the novel as a whole to be complete. While some maintain that Eliot intends Hetty to be a tragic yet still irredeemable figure because of her lack of sympathy (Ruth 49), others like U.C. Knoepflmacher argue that Eliot's narrator and even Eliot herself characterize her as someone little better if not worse than an animal, incapable of understanding "the full import of her actions." She is apparently "indicted from the start" (Knoepflmacher 119) by the "false air of innocence" that the novel's narrator ties so intimately to her beauty and vanity (*Adam Bede* 93). The fact of her child murder seems almost like an afterthought to her lesser "crimes" of silk ribbon envy. Other critics take an opposite approach, arguing that while Eliot may condemn Hetty's "ambitious sexuality with unyielding austerity," she lacks the tactful control over Hetty or the text to complete this characterization, Hetty becoming "a more challengingly complex figure than the narrator wants her to be" (Auerbach 40) through readers' relationships to her. What all these criticisms have in common, however, is the belief that Eliot and/or her narrator holds the simple premise that Hetty, regardless of the extent of Eliot's intent, is immutably unsympathetic.

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[4] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (Penguin Books, 2008), p. 93.

I, however, do not agree that this premise is as self-evidently or deterministically true as its proponents would argue. Instead, I argue that what we actually see when analyzing Hetty's lack of sympathy within *Adam Bede*, whether that which she does not direct towards others or which others do not direct towards her, actually is the means by which Eliot complicates and redefines her vision of sympathy that would become so foundational for her later novels. Throughout this chapter, I use narratological and feminist arguments to demonstrate how Eliot's sympathy is not the altruistic or mutual process of benevolent thoughts and actions it is often considered to be, and that it instead relies on a process of recognizing the inherent and irrevocable distance between all people, not just those like Hetty who do not appear to immediately demand our pity. This distance is not merely a matter of physical distance, though that may certainly be a factor, but primarily a psychic and mental one which arises from the recognition of our mutual alterity. It is only by understanding that we never can occupy another's mind and can never know how they feel or think, let alone actually feel or think as they do, that we are then able to approach them with sympathy. Within the story of *Adam Bede* in particular, the narrative distance between Hetty, the narrator, and the text itself defines and reinforces this alterity, making her an object of sympathy precisely because of the distance which previous critics have said bars her from it. Hetty's vanity and suffering may alienate us as readers, but it is precisely this alienation that models and informs our experience of Eliot's sympathy throughout the novel as a whole rather than threatening its existence.

The clearest picture of Hetty's state of mind, and of our distance from her as a result, comes from the very first mention of her within the novel, "The Hall Farm" chapter. Sandwiched between descriptions of the home and Mrs. Poyser's cleaning, the narrator's description of the polished oak tables leads them to matter-of-factly inform us that "Hetty Sorrel often took the

opportunity, when her aunt's back was turned, of looking at the pleasing reflection of herself in those polished surfaces, for the oak table was usually turned up like a screen, and was more for ornament than for use . . ." (*AB* 80). Several elements of this short passage are worth discussing in depth. First, who exactly are we meant to assume is providing us with this information, and how do they know it? While the beginning pages of this chapter are already related from the perspective of some kind of omniscient yet removed narrator, the sudden shift into what Hetty thinks and does seems to further emphasize their authority and concretely personify it. However, the phrase "pleasing reflection of herself" clearly shows that this shift obfuscates an even more sudden one into an instance of free indirect discourse. In the space of a short circumstantial clause, we've transitioned from what appears to be a third-party view of Hetty to Hetty's view of herself, the adjective "pleasing" combined with the reflexive pronoun "herself" clearly marking the fact that we're now occupying her perspective instead. And yet, Eliot has purposefully obfuscated that moment, ironically putting us at a narrative distance from Hetty with her insistent focus on her own reflection and perspective and also with the very free indirect discourse that elsewhere is meant to draw us into a character's state of mind. With that said, it is undeniable that we do learn *something* about Hetty, namely, that she views the world and herself in secret and with an eye towards their ornamental value as a means and even the primary means of understanding them. She is both intensely self-referential and internal, and this brief introduction shows us how even external perspectives of her are colored by that fact. As this passage implies, the more an external observer (or narrator) tries to understand Hetty through themselves, the more her own will and state of mind insularly protects and emphasizes itself.

The psychic distance between Hetty and readers, as well as between Hetty and narrator, deepens when we consider the extent to which it is rendered in particularly gendered terms.

Hetty's focus on her personal beauty (rather than, say, some abstract idea of nature's beauty) is a uniquely feminine one within *Adam Bede*, emphasized further by the focus it places on discussing and understanding Hetty in terms of her body. While both ostensibly have the same subject, they cleave in psychologically and narratively important ways. Most critically, as mentioned above, Hetty's view of herself is dependent on how she can see and shape it in external objects like tables (or, as we'll soon see, in the dairy) and yet it exists almost wholly in relation to itself. Meanwhile, other characters and even the narrator themselves acknowledge their inability to comprehend her as she is by resorting instead to describing her beauty as "like that of kittens, or very small downy ducks making gentle rippling noises . . ." (*AB* 92). Despite these innocent beginnings, however, the narrator takes a serious and explicit departure from the above to apparently direct and even dictate how the audience themselves feel about Hetty's beauty, describing it as "a beauty with which you can never be angry, but that you feel ready to crush for inability to comprehend the state of mind into which it throws you" (*AB* 92). Though Eliot frequently prefigures Hetty's fate throughout the novel, this is the clearest example which interweaves that fate with Eliot's larger concerns about narrative accessibility as it pertains to women in particular. The narrator sets up the definite nature of this innocent language in order to lull readers into falsely believing that they, the text, and the character have somehow come to a mutual understanding at the same time as they make that mutual understanding completely impossible. The sudden shift into the second-person perspective, that of the reader's specifically, only furthers our increasing awareness that the text asks us to perform two totally contradictory acts: we must see and recognize Hetty, and yet we must also know that doing so means we can never see and recognize her as she actually is. Her beautiful exterior, and the text which shapes it, invites the reader's gaze in order to irrevocably (and purposely) refract it.

Helena Michie's insights in *The Flesh Made Word* are of particular interest here to scry Eliot's purpose in mutually distancing Hetty from her viewers and Hetty's viewers from her. What Michie elucidates most clearly is that the distance placed between readers and the text, including and especially its female characters, is located at the narrative level instead of the social, moral, or political. In saying so, she clarifies that any sympathetic objections to female characters like Hetty do not solely arise because their actions and values, or lack thereof, are unconscionable or offensive to contemporary readers, although that factor cannot be entirely ruled out (Michie 84). Moreover, since that distance exists solely in the relationship between a particular reader and the novel itself, it incompletely explains on its own why critics have argued Hetty to be an absolute figure of disdain and her character to be in purposeful and irrevocable disrepute. In particular, Michie likens the task of describing female heroines[5] to the broader narrative duty "to bear many of the burdens of realism," namely because "the novel must in effect conjure up the body which will claim our attention . . . until it is properly disposed of" (Michie 85). This is a particularly gendered duty for the realist writer (as Eliot obviously was) because of the near ubiquity in Victorian novels of dealing with "a physically beautiful heroine and . . . the disposition of her body in marriage or death . . ." (85). If we accept a definition of realism that strives for "a kind of authenticity, an honest representation of one's own feelings and perceptions" above mere literal representations of things as they are, and moreover that such representation serves to dramatize "the value of the ordinary" (Henry and Levine 6), we see more clearly see how Michie's theory that any given description of a heroine bears "the burden of both disclosure and concealment" through the description's inherent "double and self-erasing portrait" of her comes to fruition and then is enacted by Eliot through Hetty in *Adam Bede*.

[5] Hetty is arguably not a heroine in the colloquial sense of a morally righteous protagonist. However, I argue that she is so uniquely foundational to the novel's plot, themes, and origins that she fulfills that function regardless.

As alluded to above, one of Michie's primary concerns is elucidating the paradox (though she herself does not use the term) which emerges in texts that makes "mirror-readings" of their modes and heroines possible, namely, that what appears to be "constriction" of the female form can be "reread and reenvisioned as liberating and vice versa." Referencing the object of the mirror, "with its infinite potential for multiplication and distortion, its opposite connotations of vanity and introspection," allows authors to create a metaphor ripe "for reflection of and upon the female body" (Michie 88). Michie's own critical "mirror" aligns more closely with Eliot's realist and sympathetic project than it might appear to at first glance, namely in making clear the fact that even the most perfect mirror offers up, by its very definition, a necessarily imperfect and distorted image of what it hopes to represent, never the thing itself. Furthermore, the "moment of reflection" on which we rely to see and read those female characters itself fails because we find ourselves, and will always find ourselves, limited to reading "the surface of the mirror, the scratches upon it" (Michie 88), and upon, as it were, the female characters we believe it possible to see unmarred. Rather than being a weakness of realist fiction, however, this "failure" to find ourselves reflected in novels or, from the author's perspective, to reflect our world in novels – reified in *Adam Bede* itself by Eliot's muddied "single drop of ink" (*AB* 9) and Hetty's oak table (*AB* 80) – is precisely the aim. Though she refers specifically to *Middlemarch*'s Dorothea in this passage, Michie identifies an ironic quality of liberation found in Eliot's fiction more generally. Women, "imprisoned by the very concentric circles" of description that seem to, agent-like, "arrange themselves around" female characters, increasingly make their points of view "at once focal and inaccessible" (Michie 109).

Such shifts in the "framing, unframing, and framing [of women's bodies] become part of the act of reading, of inhabiting the fictive world of the novel . . ." (109), a pattern we have seen

even in our limited views of Hetty so far. That this process takes the form of a conscious distancing of the female body and character from its own referent, what Michie calls a female sense of "physicality" (109), is clearly purposeful within Eliot's fiction generally and particularly in the character of Hetty. Whether undertaken by the narrator or by the female character herself as an act of self-repression or self-framing (109), the result is the same: female characters and authors subvert expressions of the female experience and of femininity where they most seem to conform to the repressive and destructive expectations of literary and broader cultural spheres. Most importantly, as Michie has elucidated, they subvert those expressions so thoroughly that we, though totally unaware the process is occurring, are nonetheless destabilized in our convictions that the "mirror" of the novel stands unscratched and that we can trust our visions or judgements of the world and characters we see, especially the female characters we were only superficially encouraged to feel secure in defining. In this way, even the act of description, which was previously framed as an act of destruction, becomes turned on its head. The more we think we can understand and reify (or literally objectify when captured in a mirror's image) female characters, the more they become distant, inaccessible, and liberated from that inherently repressive mode of knowing. And yet, the more distant and inaccessible they become, the more they necessarily preoccupy our readings of not just them but of the text as a whole in which they were systemically contained *and* excluded from. Female distance, like the women who originate it, is defined by its opposites. By mirroring and embodying in female characters the paradox of representation that realism attempts to confront, authors like Eliot irrevocably and closely align representations of women (especially ones like Hetty who are so purposefully and intensely self-interested) with their literary and moral systems. Repressed, silenced, and otherwise distanced from the novels which created them and the readers who consume them, female characters and

authors are perfectly positioned to exploit and qualify the tension inherent in the acts of description to which they seemingly or actually conform.

The next point of contention to undertake, now that it is clear how distance from the text makes it possible for the female characters being distanced to more actively define themselves within their respective novels, is to more acutely return to the question of George Eliot and of Hetty Sorrel. More particularly, we now concern ourselves with arguing that Eliot, herself working within the sense of repression so crucial to producing Victorian novels and depictions of Victorian heroines, used the necessity and ubiquity of distance to align the traditionally marginalized, unsympathetically read, and proudly (if quietly) egotistical Hetty Sorrel with her overarching philosophy of sympathy. The primary way this connection is established is through what distance predicates but does not entirely encapsulate, namely the concept of alterity.[6] Besides the textbook definition, I argue that alterity as it is defined by unsympathetic characters like Hetty is not merely the fact of distance between people and perspectives but an active recognition and cultivation of the inaccessibility of the other. One's identity is not just separate from another's but irrevocably so, unable to be merged together with whatever conventional definitions of sympathy might try to demand of us. The more we attempt to forge this imperfect connection regardless, the more we are confronted with its impossibility. Eventually, the only possible result is that we must alter what we consider sympathy to appear and act like within Eliot's novels, since it cannot be an unproblematic melding among characters, readers, or the narrator themselves. The alterity Hetty encourages through her unsympathetic nature is exactly what forces us to confront the tension between our expectations of Eliot's sympathy and the form

[6] "The fact or state of being other or difference; diversity, difference, otherness; an instance of this." "alterity, n." *OED Online*.

it actually takes. In the end, that alterity vis-à-vis lack of sympathy is even what will allow Hetty to become subversively and decisively sympathetic herself.

The exact form of this alterity starts to take shape as we get more direct, though hardly intimate, views into Hetty's state of mind and perspective that are increasingly unmediated by the explicitly male gaze through which we saw her in the dairy. Appropriately, the chapter entitled "Hetty's World" begins to introduce both her primary concerns and how they diverge so distinctly from those of the people around her and (though perhaps only ostensibly) from those of the novel itself. The plot has just been uprooted by news of the death of Adam Bede's father, yet the narrator informs us "I am afraid Hetty was thinking a great deal more of the looks Captain Donnithorne had cast at her than of Adam and his troubles. Bright, admiring glances . . . a gold chain, occasional regimentals, and wealth and grandeur immeasurable – those were the warm rays that set poor Hetty's heart vibrating . . ." (*AB* 106). The narrator's subsequent appeal that we "must learn to accommodate ourselves" to the fact that some human souls "have only a very limited range of music, and will not vibrate in the least under a touch that fills others with tremulous rapture or quivering agony," makes it clear that they neither expect us to understand nor to take up Hetty's particular values (I would argue doing so is actively discouraged), but that we must understand the principle of difference behind them all the same. Eliot's choice of the word "accommodate," rather than, say, something like "assimilate," suggests the sense of uneasy tolerance that will persist throughout the rest of the chapter and indeed the rest of Hetty's story as long as we have access to and yet must be aware of our necessarily peripheral status to it.

The narrator goes beyond mere tolerance, however, when describing Hetty's relationship to Adam and how, despite her incredulity at the thought of ever marrying him, she still "liked to feel that this strong, skillful, keen-eyed man was in her power, and would have been indignant if

he had shown the least sign of slipping from under the yoke of her coquettish tyranny . . .” (108-9). The decisive language used to describe Adam, as well as the solidly indicative “liked,” reinforces the strength of Hetty’s voice and desires at the same time as those desires exclude us more definitively from her particular circumstances and perspective, especially given Hetty’s assurance that Adam was “not much given to run after the lasses” besides herself (107). The narrator’s shift from Hetty describing Adam into describing Hetty herself begins with a conspicuous conditional perfect “would have been indignant,” a construction which suggests that such indignity is not just hypothetical but outright grammatically counterfactual. On the level of the text itself, Hetty’s separation from readers is reinforced even as it appears to draw us in closer. Through the use of grammar, the narrator employs a conscious misdirection of focus towards the hardly possible indignation and away from Hetty herself. The narrator’s reliance on these conditional, indirect ways of communicating what appears to be Hetty’s uncomplicated opinion and perspective is itself a form of alterity in that it acutely reveals how two elements of a text, namely Hetty’s character and the language used to describe that character, derive their meaning from appearing to merge while remaining distinctly separate. This sense is further emphasized by the narrator’s apparent refusal to slip into free indirect discourse to communicate Hetty’s perspective. Given the frequent usage of such discourse throughout *Adam Bede* in other contexts, its distinct absence here given its typical use for such merging perspectives only serves to throw the problematic conditionals we do get into sharp relief, and with them Hetty’s distinct sense of alterity and selfhood. In this way, Hetty’s lack of sympathy ironically aligns with the narration that attempts to reveal it through sympathetic means only in order to deconstruct the very same. With both Hetty and the narrator refusing access to Hetty herself and to the typical sympathetic process within Eliot’s novels, we are forced into recognizing both the limited and

the productive nature of our incongruous perspectives, an incongruity which will ultimately allow both for the survival of Hetty's point of view and the creation of a new kind of sympathy for her.

Arising as it does from a tension between perspectives, the alterity and sympathy that Hetty's and the narrator's process inspires for the novel through the apparent lack of it in herself are especially characterized by the tension inherent in how Hetty's apparent conformity to and fulfillment of valued standards of femininity and beauty conceals her decided deviation from them, a deviation located mostly in her visions of her own future. In chapters like "The Two Bed-Chambers," for instance, Eliot goes to great lengths to reveal how the tender and nurturing motivations that characters like Adam and Arthur assign to Hetty and her actual motivations are not only contradictory but entirely mutually exclusive. I argue that Eliot includes these sections that challenge our preoccupations with what a beautiful woman should be and should think like in order to take the standards of femininity with which Hetty is judged to their extreme, showing not only their untenability and absurdity but even their impossibility on the level of an actual individual (as opposed to an ideal). As such, the sympathy we might feel for Hetty through their perspectives is equally untenable, especially because Hetty's apparent fulfillment of feminine archetypes and duties only further conceals her subversion of those same values, shown, for instance, in her dislike of children and small animals (*AB* 169). In this way, Hetty and the narrator's process of subversion and concealment comes to replace and supersede previous conceptions of sympathy. In failing to comply with some absolute standard of feminine virtue, Hetty forces us to reconsider who a woman must be and what she must do to earn our sympathy, and also forces us to alter how we enact that sympathy within fiction. Ultimately, the sympathy with which we must regard Hetty will prove to be dependent on Hetty's conscious concealment

of herself, becoming both more necessary and possible because she herself becomes more intangible.

As I alluded to above, the clearest place within *Adam Bede* we see this development of sympathy at work is in "The Two Bed-Chambers," in which we get several extended passages of Hetty's own engagements with femininity, as well as extended interjections by the narrator that seemingly introduce Arthur's and Adam's views of those engagements only to discredit them. Most pertinently, Hetty's enactment of her ideals of beauty, though they might reference conventionally public and masculine displays (e.g., imaging how Arthur "would like to see her in nice clothes, and thin shoes and white stockings, perhaps with silk clocks to them; for he must love her very much . . ." [*AB* 165]), are actually mired in intense and deliberate privacy. Though her means of self-observation are marred by the marks of outside origins – her mirror having "numerous dim blotches sprinkled over [it]" and an imperfectly chosen chest of drawers preventing her from getting "near the glass at all comfortably" – the process of observation itself stays quite literally close to Hetty, with the keys to her secret fineries, and thus to her introspection, contained by her gown and pocket (*AB* 164). Most notably of all, apparently external observers, like the narrator's description of "an invisible spectator whose eye rested on [Hetty] like morning on the flowers" (*AB* 165), are indeed only manifestations of Hetty reflecting on herself, since this "invisible spectator" is immediately predicated by Hetty looking at herself in the mirror "with quite a different sensation from what she had ever felt before" (*AB* 164).

Reading Hetty's characterization as primarily self-monitoring and self-isolating is further supported by the generally nebulous language Hetty uses to describe this spectator and the hypothetical results of his affection, since it has been well-established that she does not and cannot care to entertain the thoughts of others and therefore would have no definitive language

with which to describe them. Though identified with Arthur in the minds of readers through context, strictly speaking Hetty's spectator has no identifying characteristics or motivations besides those that align with Hetty's own desires and experiences – "[h]is soft voice was saying over and over again those pretty things she had heard in the woods; his arm was around her, and the delicate rose-scent of his hair was with her still" (*AB* 165). When she finally does consider the issue of Arthur more directly, it is through a uniquely indirect and conditional kind of free indirect discourse that coalesces his perspective as well as that of the narrator into her own, rather than the cooperative and direct kind we might expect. In this voice, we return to Hetty musing how "Captain Donnithorne couldn't like her to go on doing work . . . He would want to marry her, and make a lady of her; she could hardly dare to shape the thought – yet how else could it be?" (*AB* 165). What this short passage reveals, however, is that even Hetty's meager attempts to reckon with other perspectives only serve to reinforce her own. We already know, for instance, that Arthur in his own moment of free indirect discourse after their first kiss considered that there was no possibility of marriage with Hetty, and that her reputation would be ruined rather than strengthened by association with him (*AB* 151).

In this way, we see how Hetty has yet again both projected herself into the minds of other people and barred herself from them. Her interjection of, "Oh, it was impossible to think how it would be! But Captain Donnithorne would know; he was a great gentleman, and could have his way in everything, and could buy everything he liked. And nothing could be as it had been again . . ." (*AB* 166) brims with the petulant frustration, ignorance, and idyllic visions we recognize in Hetty alone, while at the same time maintaining the ironically distant free indirect discourse that makes it possible for Hetty's discrete sense of self to be preserved. In this way, she is both inaccessible and, however tentatively, identifiable; therein lies the heart of Hetty's tragedy and

sympathetic identity. Her persistent framing of herself as central in her own life is enough to maintain her status as a figure worthy of consideration and resistant to subsummation by her community and readers, yet it is *not* enough (and can never be enough) to provide her the narrative connections which guarantee any kind of unproblematic connection to the story.

Ironically, then, the primary means of sympathy for Hetty occurs when these uncertain moments of self-aggrandization are juxtaposed with the patterns of male perspective and power, which simultaneously enable them and make them impossible within the novel. Rather than condoning these perspectives, however, it is clear from context that their main use is to show how futile it is to approach Hetty sympathetically from an external and misogynistic frame, such as the narrator provides us through Arthur's and Adam's own thoughts about her. At the very least, they make it very clear how conventionally "sympathetic" readings can only be possible if based on references to Hetty's actual inner life, however removed from the narrative, rather than idealized and omniscient versions of it. With Hetty caught up in her own dream-world, the narrator quickly shifts from Hetty's manifestations of her life into others' manifestations of her with a knowing interjection about "[h]ow pretty the little puss looks in that odd dress! It would be the easiest folly in the world to fall in love with her . . ." (*AB* 166). Their language is opposed to Hetty's in its reliance on absolutes, relaying the implicit belief of the men of Hayslope that Hetty's "heart must be just as soft, her temper just as free from angles, her character just as pliant" as her body (*AB* 167) – insights which the narrator discredited by making our ironically less imperfect (by comparison) and removed view of her possible. Even its "would," though reminiscent of Hetty's own words, has an omniscience and omnipresence her speech never can, since what the narrator says "would" happen already has – and twice over – while Hetty's own desires tragically and necessarily cling far too closely to herself to ever be realized.

Alternatively, Adam's and Arthur's points of view have a somewhat more legitimate claim to being sympathetic, mostly since their own perspectives have the same grammatical hint of uncertainty as Hetty's does. For instance, though the narrator identifies Adam with the thought of, "How [Hetty] will dote on her children! She is almost a child herself . . .," they temper it with the note that, "It was very much in this way that our friend Adam Bede thought about Hetty; only he put his thoughts into different words . . ." (*AB* 167) to make his inability to read Hetty for who she is at the very least more benign, even if it cannot be wholly sympathetic. Arthur similarly suffers from these same sorts of misconceptions about Hetty's character and motivations, at least "so far as he had thought of her nature at all," feeling certain that "she was a dear, affectionate, good little thing" (*AB* 168). Of the two, Arthur is perhaps surprisingly more aligned with Hetty's own sympathetic processes (though this alignment cannot lend itself to sympathetic feeling on its own) since his visions of their future are equally as opaque, vague, and without reference to actual reality as hers.

Even Arthur, in his own apparent moments of free indirect discourse, is referred to in similarly nebulous terms like "[t]he man who awakes the wondering tremulous passion of a young girl" and who "probably imagines himself being virtuously tender to her . . ." (*AB* 168) rather than with reference to his actual identity and actions. For this reason, there is a sardonic and unintuitive bent to the narrator's following direct address to readers: "I believe the wisest of us must be beguiled in this way sometimes, and must think both better and worse of people than they deserve . . ." (*AB* 168). Though at first glance appearing to reference how Hetty has apparently deceived both Arthur and Adam in terms of her character, the comment's vague allusions to Arthur's similarly vague sense of duty and chivalry in his treatment of Hetty, taken in conjunction with the chapter's previous intense focus on Hetty's visions of Arthur, instead

suggests that it is Hetty herself who has been beguiled, and that it is Hetty herself who has been slighted more than she deserves. Arthur and Adam, in relying on their gendered stereotypes to feign a false sense of connection to Hetty, have themselves failed to detect the sympathetic reading of Hetty that Eliot has laid out. Hetty herself becomes the object of our sympathy rather than them, not the least because our hearts must go out to a girl who breaks her protectively insular rules of sympathetic engagement to fall in love with a man who only "probably" sees himself acting as virtuously as she imagines and requires. Indeed, the narrator's next observation that one "begins to suspect at length that there is no direct correlation between eyelashes and morals" (*AB* 168) is another statement that unintuitively leans in Hetty's favor, since it suggests that neither her good traits nor her bad ones can be attributed to her beauty or to how others perceive it. Even if Hetty is not "good" by our moral evaluations, nothing she ever consciously or unconsciously puts forward suggests otherwise. Calling her unsympathetic because she fails to meet misogynistic assumptions about the relationship between her beauty and inner life surely does not cleave to Eliot's broader concerns about recognizing the little dignities that all people possess and viewing them with compassion.

If anyone (reader or otherwise) feels themselves deceived by Hetty and unsympathetic towards her plight because of it, it is because they themselves have failed to detect the gendered sympathetic constraints that she and the narrator have set, namely the constraint of never presuming the ability to touch the mind (or the body, for that matter) of another person. When a woman like Hetty has only been allowed a limited physical space to call her own and to shape as the backdrop of her own life, and an even more limited psychic world in which to do the same, it is little wonder that she retreats into the safety of a selfish and self-referential kind of sympathy, requiring only herself to be enacted, rather than relying on the fickle favors of masculinity to

define it for her at the expense of her uniquely gendered vulnerability. Hetty's "dim ill-defined pictures that her narrow bit of an imagination can make of the future" in which she is always "the central figure in fine clothes" (*AB* 168) that people are admiring, envying, or, in Arthur's case, kissing, may not espouse the standards of harmonious communal living and mutually beneficial care that Eliot stresses elsewhere in her works, but neither are they meant to. The narrator's likening of Hetty to a plant that has hardly any roots and could be laid "over your ornamental flower-pot, and . . . blossom none the worse" (*AB* 169) is not an indictment of her personal failings, but instead drags the failures of the community and its ideology into the light, namely its failure to, as Eliot elsewhere demanded, accommodate those outside its narrow definition of sympathetic objects and subjects.

On the level of the plot, Hetty's lack of close familial relations, her lack of economic means or the ability to improve them, and her lack of connections to others besides their seeing her as a romantic and sexual partner all contribute to threaten her subsummation, something that she only manages to escape on the level of the text itself through her persistent framing of herself as central and indeed as the *only* center in her own life and in everyone else's. Rather than accepting her erasure, Eliot maintains Hetty's voice in the story on its own terms, making it possible for her to persist within the novel *because* of her concealment within it and her dubious connections to it. In Hetty, we see Eliot walk the line between creating a female character who has an entirely diffusive identity threatened with dissolution and one entirely separate threatened with isolation and repression; and in Hetty, we see how the tension between those two extremes focalizes female characters who otherwise would have been systematically dismantled, divvied up, and forgotten within the text for existing outside of its conventional ideological bounds. In other words, for all her vanity and passion and selfishness, Hetty forces us to confront ourselves

rather than her alone. She forces us to contend with the text, its world, and its characters in ways that would otherwise be ironically unimaginable. Far from being outside the bounds of sympathy, Eliot uses Hetty to model the conditions and appearance of her sympathetic ideal.

III. *Middlemarch* and Rosamond Vincy:
The Narrative and Sympathetic Authority of a "[S]culptured Psyche"[7]

Rosamond Vincy, much like the broader category of womankind to which she belongs, has long been considered a figure of both desire and disdain. From Eliot's own time onwards, (primarily male) critics who otherwise praised Eliot's work and characters derided Rosamond as "altogether odious," as Lydgate's "miserable little wife" who possessed a unique and graceful viciousness, and as a "deadly electric eel," according to William Deans Howells, Henry James, and Gordon Haight, respectively (Goldfarb 83). Reading these criticisms, one would open *Middlemarch* expecting to see a conniving predator of a woman who cares as much for treating humanity with love and sympathy as she does mud beneath her kidskin boots. What we actually see, I argue, is a woman imbued with more complexity of character and selfhood than has hitherto been recognized, even by more sympathetic critics and scholars. If Rosamond is an electric eel, she firstly must be a rather pretty one, and secondly is no more an unsympathetic electric eel than any of the other figures populating Eliot's little Midlands town and is certainly no less deserving of sympathy than they are.

Indeed, rather than merely being *as* sympathetic as her fellow Middlemarchers, I argue throughout this chapter that Rosamond is, in fact, *Middlemarch*'s means of sympathy herself and that she defines sympathy accordingly. Assigning such an important role to a character who seems peripheral in comparison to the likes of Dorothea or her own husband Lydgate may seem to overextend the importance Eliot places on the inner lives of all people, but it does not. Indeed, Rosamond's marginal status within the novel deliberately mirrors the way in which she considers the lives of her fellow Middlemarchers as peripheral to her own apparently grander and

[7] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (Penguin Books, 2003), p. 642.

necessarily egotistic narrative. In this way, Rosamond's apparent vanity and lack of sympathy, which distance her from the other characters and even Eliot's narrator, are precisely what allow her to not only become a sympathetic character herself but also to hold a privileged position as another narrator who even supplants Eliot's own in some instances, defining sympathy within *Middlemarch* and beyond as a result. Rosamond is prioritized both as a sympathetic character and narrator because of, not in spite of, her inability to see into others' minds or recognize herself there – the hitherto conventional definition of sympathy applied to Eliot's fiction.[8]

Rosamond's displacement and distance from the very community that values her for conforming to their feminine ideals is present from the very beginning of the novel. Rosamond is mentioned for the first time by the old bachelor Chichely only as a "Miss Vincy" who apparently satisfies his preference for blondes "with a certain gait, and a swan neck" (*Middlemarch* 89). Rosamond herself is not present at the dinner party, Mr. Brooke having decided that talk of a manufacturer's daughter's beauty is more acceptable than the manufacturer's daughter herself in the company of his high(er)-born nieces. We end chapter ten, titled "Miss Brooke," with Lydgate leaving the party while reminiscing on the "fine" but all too earnest Dorothea, and immediately begin chapter eleven with Lydgate drawing our attention to a woman who has already caught his fascination instead for being "grace itself" – our very own Rosamond, whose full name (though not the full sense of her identity) is first revealed by Lydgate himself (*MM* 94). He is brought down from his mythological musings about how association with her is equal to "reclining in paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for a heaven" (*MM* 95) by Eliot herself, who seemingly mocks Lydgate's ignorance of "sarcastic" Destiny and uses his metonymy,

[8] See, for example, Michael Carlson's "Famish Tigress: Sympathy and the Other in George Eliot's Fiction," *George Eliot – George Henry Lewes Studies*, no. 58/59, 2010, p. 61.

taking it to its extreme, to make us recognize Rosamond for herself rather than buy into his flattering yet incomplete image of her.

In her focus on "old provincial society" and "its share of this subtle movement" (*MM* 95), Eliot likens herself to Herodotus, "who also . . . thought it well to take a woman's lot for his starting-point; though Io . . . was the reverse of Miss Brooke, and in this respect perhaps bore more resemblance to Rosamond Vincy . . ." (*MM* 96). It is precisely in this moment when Eliot adopts Lydgate's elevated yet subtly misogynistic language that she is then able to challenge it, giving us our first lengthy introduction to Rosamond and all her success at Mrs. Lemon's school, "even to extras, such as the getting in and out of a carriage" (*MM* 96). In this way, Eliot shows us how the lofty and adoring, yet dehumanizing, language of the patriarchal society surrounding and defining Rosamond is linked to her more grounded concerns of provincial life, with Rosamond herself becoming the representative of that "subtle movement" of human life that Eliot espouses. Rosamond embodies the novel's major concerns about representing the breadth and depth of human life where and *because* that breadth and depth are denied to her. In other words, she represents the ways in which Eliot's broader concerns about sympathy and narrative become articulable and knowable in localized and marginalized contexts and characters. Eliot's movement from idealized, privileged perspectives to real, marginalized ones is complete when, only a few pages into the chapter, we no longer see Rosamond from Lydgate's eyes but rather him from hers in a sudden (though not unexpected) injunction: "Rosamond silently wished that her father would invite Mr. Lydgate. She was tired of the faces and figures she had always been used to . . ." (*MM* 97). Rosamond becomes the lens through which we view not only her own household (who come into focus after this thought), but everyone in Middlemarch around her.

Indeed, in initially denying Rosamond her own voice, portraying her through the veil of mythological references and an apparently silly education, Eliot actually makes it possible for Rosamond to quietly yet confidently take up the narrative groundwork she has laid, and sets a precedent for Rosamond's ability to fashion her own interpretative authority as the novel's own. Rosamond's peripheral position is so ingrained into *Middlemarch*'s (and Middlemarch's) very structure that what she thinks and says becomes what the novel and its community think and say in turn, even if only within her own mind. Having said that, it is important to draw a clear distinction between Rosamond as an author and narrator. I am not arguing that Rosamond has some kind of legitimate control over the facts or creation of the text: its plot, structure, etc. Nor do I argue that, despite what Rosamond herself believes, she actually knows exactly what others are thinking and can have undue influence over their thoughts merely because she is who she is. Instead, I am arguing that, regardless of her ability to control those facts, Rosamond emerges as a voice of narratorial authority that forces us as readers to reconsider her place in the novel at all and her importance to interpreting the novel as a whole. Rather than merely being one voice among many in the vast ensemble of characters that surround her and attempt to assimilate that voice into their own, Rosamond uses the very language and conventions intended to silence her to elevate herself and her parallel interpretation of the novel to a uniquely complementary perspective in relationship with Eliot's own.

Rosamond's role as proxy narrator begins in earnest when she first meets Lydgate, with her taking control of the story and even his voice before they have even spoken to one another. Whom are we supposed to believe is speaking, for instance, when Lydgate notices Rosamond's care in "not showing her dimples on the wrong occasion" (*MM* 116), when only Rosamond has

mentioned her dislike of them before and only to herself?[9] That having been said, her control over the narrative is not total or unqualified, as we see on the very next page when the narrator who has both an omniscient and intimate perspective into Rosamond's mind parenthetically informs us that "[e]very nerve and muscle in Rosamond was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at. She was by nature an actress of parts . . . . she even acted her own character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own" (*MM* 117). Rosamond soon regains her own voice, however, assuring us that not only had she immediately and correctly interpreted her and Lydgate's meeting as falling in love, but also as something she had contemplated beforehand (*MM* 117). Indeed, it was brought to fruition *because* she imagined it. The line between narrator and Rosamond becomes even more blurred when a moment of free indirect discourse defends Rosamond's interpretation of herself, the other characters, and the plot itself, seeing as "[t]hese things happened so often at balls, and why not by the morning light, when the complexion showed all the better for it?" (*MM* 118). The most pressing point at hand here is the way in which Rosamond's narration and the otherwise unidentified narrator's narration, despite coming very close together in many points and even appearing to merge in others, in fact retain their separation. Free indirect discourse would hardly be necessary if a character's and narrator's points of view were so intertwined as to be self-evidently the same. Thus, there is a necessary tension between the omniscient narrator and the characters whom they represent, especially for characters like Rosamond whose most introspective and reflective moments, as we've now seen, are still tinged with selfishness and vanity.

This is precisely the tension which Rae Greiner elucidates in "Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel," which provides much of the critical support for and

[9] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (Penguin Books, 2003), p. 98.

greatly expands upon questions of Rosamond's sympathetic position and narrative authority. Most foundationally, Greiner questions the "conventional wisdom that nineteenth-century realism patterns sympathy on an identificatory model in which social feeling flows from the ability to stand beyond while 'seeing into' others" (Greiner 292). Indeed, she proposes "a model of sympathy divested of the demands for simultaneity, identification, and knowledge" and identifies the ways in which nineteenth-century realists, including Eliot herself, were very much aware of how the omniscient narration they relied upon itself "posed serious problems for authors hoping to . . . train readers in the ethics of sympathy" (293). Eliot's sense of sympathy necessarily required "doing" rather than thinking or feeling and was "regularly imagined as an action taking place in the absence of knowledge . . . thus affording would-be sympathizers no resources to the comforting reassurance of identity" (294). Using Adam Smith's theory of sympathy as derived from his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Greiner argues that time is essential to considering what form sympathy takes in realist novels. Sympathy not only requires repeated and deliberate effort on one's part because "its effects cannot be sustained" throughout the course of a novel otherwise, but also because it "takes place *in* time," specifically within what she defines as narrative time, where "simultaneity is replaced by more protracted, reflexive, and deliberate acts. *Minds meet and reflect on each other, but do not merge into one*" (293, emphasis mine). In order for sympathy to work, there must be a repeated and concerted effort to actively keep minds apart, something Rosamond herself succeeds at more so than perhaps any other character within *Middlemarch*. Her lack of interest in and inability to conform to typical conventions of sympathy are exactly what reinforce both her sympathetic and omniscient status. By consciously viewing her fellow characters through her own limited and self-interested point

of view, Rosamond prioritizes herself as both an object and originator of sympathy for the novel as a whole.

Indeed, Greiner reminds us, in her own words, of Smith's "unequivocal warning that the most likely result of coming face-to-face with spectacular suffering is sympathy's failure" (296), since we are more likely to feel detached from rather than invested in another person due to their great display of emotion, let alone sympathetic enough to identify with them (296). In attempting to view and treat others with sympathy, we conform more to "speculation" than to spectatorship. Even our supposedly outward glances are inwardly bound, and even Smith's "impartial spectator" reveals the necessity of having a biased viewpoint in forming a theory of sympathy (296), and a consciously biased viewpoint at that. Indeed, the process of sympathy separates people where it seems to most connect them, reinforcing the differences between people and their lack of shared identity (297), since this sympathetic process would not be necessary at all if we could perfectly understand, feel, and identify with another's suffering without trying. "Given that nothing can secure that knowledge" about the people we interact with, "sympathy functions in its absence, requiring that our imaginative encounters with other people take the form of speculating about their conditions along with our own" (298). In summary, Greiner argues that Smith's sympathy is narrative (and thus has important implications for narratives like *Middlemarch*) because it constantly emphasizes our inability to truly see or understand another person's state of mind, relying on necessarily flawed conceptions of an impartial spectator, instead. This impartiality is in itself a kind of partiality because, having originated from a human mind, it cannot reach the omniscience which would apparently bring true sympathy.

The most salient point for future considerations of Rosamond is that Smith's and Eliot's conceptions of sympathy are limited because all conceptions of sympathy are limited, and it

seems as if the omniscience towards which she argues realist novels and their narrators had once striven is increasingly inadequate for the task of sympathy at hand. Sympathy no longer refers to the means by which we gain knowledge about other people but instead our recognition that gaining such knowledge is impossible. Our sympathetic encounters reflect our own identities and self-conceptions just as much as they reflect how we view others, if not more so. Having reached this conclusion, Greiner directly addresses the role of sympathy in Eliot's novels, in particular the sympathetic, or lack thereof, role that Rosamond plays in *Middlemarch*. If the presence of sympathy within narratives and novels paradoxically exemplifies its absence, then it increasingly comes to pass that selfish, vain, and unsympathetic Rosamond is one of the most productive sources of sympathy within *Middlemarch*. Unable and unwilling to consider others' points of view, Rosamond inadvertently fashions herself as a sympathetic authority[10] for the novel as a whole, and indeed becomes the standard for an apparently omniscient narrator, as well. Within this framework, Rosamond's egotism provides the limited point of view which is necessary for the formation of sympathy. Further, her inability and unwillingness to consider other states of being actively *privileges* her point of view and is what gives her the ability to mimic the omniscient voice of narrative authority at all, even if she cannot entirely take it up herself.

Rather than being the thoughtless girl she is typically pegged as, Rosamond is actually "nothing *but* mind . . . hers is a particularly brutal single mindedness . . . ." (302). Further still, she "can never be of two (or more) minds. She simply assimilates all minds into her own" (302). Where Greiner and I differ, however, is in believing that this therefore signals "a massive failure of imagination and a serious flaw in her sympathetic machinery" (302). Rosamond's inability to meld with the text or other characters allows her to possess a discrete individuality, and thus to

[10] Both in the sense that she herself is an object of sympathy and in that she is capable of complicating and even defining in many instances how the process of sympathy appears and works throughout *Middlemarch*.

possess a sympathy which recognizes its inseparability from that individuality. Rosamond seemingly knows she can never know another person's mind, and so she does not try. Though it is not the benevolent and brash sympathy we expect, it is sympathy nonetheless. This correlation between Rosamond's lack of connection with others and her power to generate sympathy is further supported by Greiner's recognition that Rosamond "is narrator-like in not quite having a 'self,' in being something like mindfulness entire," with this "strange power" of hers deliberately placed to give readers the "sense that omniscient temporality is one of the novelistic conventions it is her purpose to unsettle" (302). Greiner argues that Eliot draws a parallel between Rosamond and Laure, Lydgate's first (and murderous) love, in order to emphasize both Rosamond's "commonness of egotism" *and* her sense of "omnipotence" (303), an omnipotence which arises from Smith's view that sympathy exists outside of one's personal sense of time and outside of narrative time. Rosamond's persistent presence in the novel as a narrative authority, and her prosperity of mind thereof. "issues in the deathless power of her narrative to renew itself, a product of her ability to incorporate other plots into her own." In other words, Rosamond is more like the ideal realist narrator (perhaps even more like Eliot's own narrator) than has been previously imagined, sharing with Laure "a monologic power over plots that murders otherness while guaranteeing for themselves something like a narrator's infinite life" (303). Without the checks of others' thoughts or feelings weighing over her, Rosamond is free to develop the course of the novel (and the sense of sympathy within it) to her own liking, even if her influence is sometimes only felt within her own mind and thoughts and not in the events of the novel itself. Her form of sympathy avoids the problem of incomplete connection to other minds altogether, because, in Rosamond's world and in her narration, "*everybody is what she makes of them, every story one she already knows*" (303, emphasis mine).

Eliot herself acknowledges as much directly. Following almost exactly the same narrative formula as before, chapter 16 sees us again move from Lydgate's thoughts, which the novel is quick to discredit, to Rosamond's, which increasingly take precedence. In the face of Lydgate's objections to himself that, "He could not marry yet; he wished not to marry for several years; and therefore he was not ready to entertain the notion of being in love with a girl whom he happened to admire . . ." (*MM* 163), our narrator interjects to say, "Poor Lydgate! or shall I say, Poor Rosamond! Each lived in a world of which the other knew nothing" (*MM* 165), drawing the attention (and the interpretative power) back to the latter despite apparent appeals to both their characters. Even when Lydgate seems to receive a prominent spot in the narration, it is still Rosamond's own mind which prevails in the long run, seemingly justified in its subsequent presumptions about romance by the fact that Lydgate and Rosamond do eventually get married in a fashion and timeline much closer to, if not identical to, Rosamond's than to Lydgate's. Indeed, in Rosamond's ideas of their romance and in her ideas of romance more generally, "it was not necessary to imagine much about the inward life of the hero" at all, with Eliot's narrator telling us that "Rosamond, in fact, was entirely occupied not exactly with Tertius Lydgate as he was in himself, but with his relation to her . . ." (*MM* 166). Lydgate is not an individual mind to Rosamond but merely one of many men of some rank who "might, could, would be, or actually were in love with her," a mindset which the narrative both excuses and, I would argue, condones in its emphasis on how "[o]ur passions do not live apart in locked chambers" (*MM* 166-67); this connects Rosamond's dismissive categorization of this kind with the very "cleverness" and charm that makes her so attractive to her suitors and to us readers in the first place.

Rosamond's status as a character-narrator who is entirely mindfulness (and thus both selfishness and perceived omniscience in their entirety) further manifests itself in the novel when Eliot's narrator notes that:

> Rosamond, though she would never do anything that was disagreeable to her, was industrious; and now more than ever she was active . . . in being from morning till night her own standard of a perfect lady, having always an audience in her own consciousness, with sometimes the not unwelcome addition of a more variable external audience in the numerous visitors of the house. (*MM* 167)

Eliot is careful to note that this standard of a "perfect lady" is Rosamond's own, raising the question of who and whose thoughts exactly make up the internal audience to which that standard is beholden or answerable. The most immediate answer, glancing back to Greiner's analysis one final time, is that Rosamond has simply subsumed the opinions of her external audience into her own internal one, and in doing so retains her narrative authority and omniscience by fashioning her supposed watchers into subordinate aspects of her own consciousness rather than individuals to consider. This process is so complete that we as readers are left forever ignorant as to the precise influences on Rosamond, she by design being greater than the sum of her parts as both a character and narrator. If everybody is what she makes of them, every story one she already knows, it becomes clear that the characters, plots, and ideologies (including the ideology of sympathy itself) that surround Rosamond in *Middlemarch* are, if not totally subservient to and dependent on her own moments of narration, forced to reckon with, respond to, and define themselves in relation to her in order to remain narratively relevant and legitimate.

Rosamond's sympathetic authority is clearly strong enough to be considered in its own right, but its most important implications for *Middlemarch* as a whole are found within her external relationships to its other characters. As seen explicitly throughout *Middlemarch* so far, the most immediately significant to Rosamond's choices, whether narratorial or material, is Lydgate, who cycles through the roles of amused admirer, fiancé, and husband in fairly rapid succession throughout the novel. Like many relationships within *Middlemarch*, theirs represents not just itself but the sympathetic process as a whole. While we previously considered how Rosamond shapes her narrative authority and sympathy by means of Lydgate, it is now important to note how that sense shifts as they become (or do not become) a unified locus of sympathy in their marriage. A typical and colloquial view of marriage might suggest that it usually involves a psychic melding between individuals as much as a legal one, and that the couple shapes each other mutually in that process of assimilation. As we will see in the case of Rosamond and Lydgate, however, their marriage not only tolerates division but actively sows it. And it is Rosamond, as we will see, who ultimately gains far more than she gives in such an arrangement.

Here, I consult Charlie Tyson's "'A Being Part': Sympathy and Distance in *Middlemarch*,"[11] which explicitly deals with the ways in which Eliot attenuates sympathy by "emphasizing, rather than diminishing, forms of distance between reader and character" and by bringing attention to the commonplace nature of those characters' "yearning and sufferings . . . instead of allowing us to see those circumstances as highly particularized" (Tyson 7). While Tyson primarily reads *Middlemarch* as a departure from Eliot's previously characteristic "intimate focus on the poor" (8), I argue we can also read it as a departure from more conventional ideas of intimacy in personal relationships as well, perhaps nowhere more typified

[11] This title itself references their relationship: "Even this trouble, like the rest, [Rosamond] seemed to regard as if it were hers alone. [Lydgate] was always to her a being apart, doing what she objected to" (*MM* 757).

than in a relationship in which one of the partners, by her own understanding, knows everything there is to know about the other before they've even met. As Tyson explains, *Middlemarch* itself possesses "an odd disjunction" (9) between its perceived status as the pinnacle of Eliot's sympathy and the narrow social range which that sympathy encompasses. "The triumphs and failures of [Eliot's] sympathy," Tyson says, "occur mostly between well-off people in social proximity, often partners in a marriage. Think of . . . Rosamond failing to adjust her view of Lydgate as always 'a being apart' . . ." (9). To temper this social and sympathetic proximity between reader and character, Eliot must introduce "other kinds of distance that invite us to examine our upwellings of sympathy . . ." (9). Since the relationship between sympathy and distance is most in question, the most appropriate way to examine it is by considering the relationship between Rosamond and Lydgate, seeing as their relationship embodies and defines those very terms (and thereby embodies Eliot's ironically divisive sympathy, as well).

Despite the importance of this relationship, however, it is Rosamond on her own who introduces the ways in which growing intimacy with another person directly correlates with and predicts alienation from them from the very beginning of her relationship with Lydgate, and even before its proper start. Despite Lydgate's security in his belief that their (quite public) flirtation together signifies nothing more than that (*MM* 268), Rosamond does "not distinguish flirtation from love, either in herself or in another" (*MM* 267). Once again, Eliot condones this perspective. She begs readers to "[t]hink no unfair evil of her . . . she had no wicked plots, nothing sordid or mercenary . . ." and emphasizes the point by slipping into yet another instance of free indirect discourse, noting that Rosamond "was not in the habit of devising falsehoods, and if her statements were no direct clue to fact, why, they were not intended in that light – they were among her elegant accomplishments, intended to please" (*MM* 268). Despite this passage's

lip service to conventional ideas of sympathy by emphasizing Rosamond's innocent character, Eliot nonetheless more clearly cleaves to making her sympathetic with reference to her singular point of view. Rosamond's views about flirting reveal both her genuine ardency and her genuine selfishness, as well as revealing further how something that seems incredible to her also becomes impossible in the novel itself. Lydgate's apparent control over how he is perceived, whether by Rosamond or the other characters who watch their courtship with interest, increasingly falls into her hands instead. Eliot's direct address to her readers serves to lend credence to what Rosamond herself has already shown us, while Rosamond's return in that gentle "why" is skillfully and purposefully indirect, reinforcing the omnipresence and omnipotence of her narration while reminding us that such omnipresence and omnipotence are still not enough to give us a full understanding of her or of any other person, for that matter. Nor, as Rosamond also reminds us, can we ever have one.

However, this inability is not the detriment to human connection that it was previously imagined to be. Instead, it is precisely this self-referential flirting which makes their relationship possible at all; it is likewise self-referential sympathy which makes any kind of sympathy, whether in *Middlemarch* or in our own lives, possible at all. We see the productive potential of Rosamond's alienating perspective at work when it is even more explicitly addressed by the narrator soon after this moment, within a passage worth quoting in its entirety:

> To Rosamond it seemed as if she and Lydgate were as good as engaged. That they were some time to be engaged had long been an idea in her mind; and ideas, we know, tend to a more solid kind existence, the necessary materials being at hand. It is true, Lydgate had the counter idea of remaining unengaged; but this was a mere negative, a shadow cast by other resolves which themselves were capable of shrinking. Circumstances were almost

> sure to be on the side of Rosamond's idea, which had a shaping activity and looked through watchful blue eyes, whereas Lydgate's lay blind and unconcerned as a jelly-fish which gets melted without knowing it. (*MM* 271)

One of the most immediately notable elements of this passage is that, despite its description of Rosamond's state of mind, it doesn't actually include any instances of free indirect discourse, in sharp contrast to the section quoted just previously. Rather than weakening Rosamond's established narrative control, however, in context this exclusion actually finalizes its attachment to the primary narrator's own. If, as I argued earlier, free indirect discourse emphasizes the separation of perspectives even as it purports to do the opposite, then its absence here can only be considered purposeful and our awareness of its absence purposefully encouraged to communicate the ubiquity of Rosamond's nature within the text while still maintaining the proper psychic distance between narrator and character. Their perspectives may not have merged, but their purposes for telling the story at all and their desires are now inexorably cohabitating in the subconsciousness of the text. Such cohabitation gives new implications to the narrator's "we know," which again resists FID in favor of addressing readers directly and authoritatively to not just support but codify Rosamond's version of the story into *Middlemarch* itself. Indeed, while at first appearing like a kind of extrication from the story itself, the way the narrator links Rosamond's ideas about her engagement with broader philosophical ideas makes it clear that this "we know" is not only still firmly entrenched within the text but also includes Rosamond *because of*, not in spite of, her suddenly conspicuous absence. Whether she is in clear collaboration with the narrator or hidden within the text, Rosamond continually directs the story and our interpretations of it to her advantage.

The fact of this purposeful, advantageous positioning is further supported by the narrator's matter-of-fact statement that, "It is true, Lydgate had the counter idea of remaining unengaged" and their comparison of that resolve to a "mere negative, a shadow cast by other resolves" which both mark his brand of absolutism as anything but, divorced as it is from both the narrator's and Rosamond's own. The language used above certainly does not sound like anything Rosamond would say, but the ideas expressed show a clear consensus between her and the narrator as to their personal and textual implications. It is precisely the moment when her voice is not directly present in the novel that it most comes to represent its events and trajectory, and in a way that we know (with the advantage of hindsight) to be ultimately more "true" than any of Lydgate's "truths." The "shadow" of his resolve seems even more dependent on Rosamond's by the fact that it is not even cast by himself but by those "other resolves which themselves were capable of shrinking" under the illuminating influence of Rosamond's "shaping activity" and "watchful blue eyes." Within this metaphor, the equally untenable "other resolves" which source Lydgate's do not seem to refer to or originate from Rosamond's own, but instead to some other outside perspectives that are so inconsequential in light of her own as to not even be identified. To extend this metaphor ourselves, if Lydgate's resolve is a mere shadow, it increasingly seems as if Rosamond's is the "light" which gives it both the conditions and medium it needs to exist at all, a reliance which also allows Rosamond to supersede and even destroy it entirely. This result is made all the more powerful by the fact that neither Lydgate nor we as readers know it is even happening at first because of Rosamond's complete immersion in the structure of the novel itself, an immersion which has already been established to persist because of the very stubbornness and lack of sympathy for another's mind that she possesses and continually demonstrates. What is new, however, is the extent to which Eliot now concretely

attaches that lack of sympathy to the capability for shaping a text and effecting change in ways that are inaccessible to conventionally kind yet increasingly patronizing types of sympathy.

The ultimate result of Rosamond's and Lydgate's flirting (and all the subliminal exertion of her will in between) is, of course, their engagement, which, for all its binding social and romantic implications, also cements Rosamond's control over the story and its ideology of sympathy. Chapter thirty-one, which contains the engagement in question, opens with yet another conversation between her and Lydgate. Like all their others, this conversation is characterized by the ways in which apparently genteel conversation necessarily rests on foundations of mutual misunderstanding but is the more notable for what its interrupted nature suggests. To begin, Eliot draws clear attention to Lydgate's clear misinterpretation of Rosamond's comment about Dorothea's devotion to Mr. Casaubon. He takes her conclusion that, "Of course she is devoted to her husband" to signify not a particular comment about the circumstance in question, but instead a generalization about relationships between men and women in general, one which could only be produced by "the prettiest possible" and limited logic that he seems to assume women are capable of. Rosamond, however, *is* very clearly thinking in terms of pragmatic particulars, namely that, "it was not so very melancholy to be mistress of Lowick Manor with a husband likely to die soon" (*MM* 293). This minor disagreement is not registered by Lydgate himself, nor, of course, does he register the tension between what Rosamond says and thinks since she is careful to maintain and possess that tension entirely within herself. The ideological exclusivity produced by this subliminally contentious discussion continues throughout the chapter and gives Rosamond a narrative and interpretive advantage wherever she chooses to perpetuate it, which comes immediately after this moment when Lydgate appears to have the last word. However, like the "mere negative" of his resolve,

Lydgate's apparent supremacy of perspective ultimately defaults to Rosamond's voice, which is only strengthened and persists in its absence.

In this way, the sudden narrative break on the immediate next page increasingly seems to be Rosamond's response that she was denied in the actual conversation. A combination of factors – the conversational tone between them, the ill-defined or even totally undefined sense of time and place in which this conversation takes place, Lydgate's explicit flirting which was surely undertaken with the expectation of a reaction – all suggest both that we are expecting some kind of response from Rosamond *and* that this response will take an embedded yet indirect form within the text itself. In other words, the fact that Rosamond never gets the chance to do so directly in the form of quoted speech suggests less that she simply doesn't respond at all and, more so, that whatever she does say will be firmly interwoven with the broader narrative voice and events, making the narrator's subsequent musings that are both about her *and* that summarily exclude her feel like an extended daydream contained within (or at the very least dependent on) her mind rather than proof of independent, external events. As a result, the narrator's reminder that "this agreeable holiday freedom with which Lydgate hovered about the flower of Middlemarch could not continue indefinitely" (*MM* 294) gains the force of an imperative command from Rosamond with all the characteristic quietly confident incessancy that she has demonstrated elsewhere before. Critically, that nature coexists with the narrator's voice, as well, making us recognize how both voices exist simultaneously, cannot be parsed from each other, and yet maintain their distinct identities.[12] The subsequent comment that, "Whatever Miss Vincy did must be remarked . . ." (*MM* 294) is similarly commanding, but is taken further than the

[12] This situation is something like that of a Schrödinger's narrator, if you will. Both Rosamond and the narrator exist in one space at one time, and yet the act of observation (i.e., reading) will ultimately force only one to the surface. My point is that we must recognize how Rosamond herself is one of those very likely and distinct possibilities.

narrator's previous remark about "the flower of Middlemarch" in that Rosamond/the narrator actualize this agentless action – must be remarked by whom, exactly? – into the text itself as both one of the clearest yet most problematic instances of free indirect discourse we've discussed yet. Rosamond's vain self-interest in how she is perceived and her command over the text does and must exist simultaneously with the narrator's own obligation to attempt whatever reconciliations between perspectives that are possible to create under Rosamond's limitations and control. The result within the text itself is that Rosamond/the narrator actually do achieve what they jointly say in this critical moment; they make others remark on Rosamond, specifically through the lens of her and Lydgate's relationship, and it is precisely the gossip around the subject that allows Rosamond to both refute it and actualize it on her own terms.

I would agree with those who might say it is not possible to definitely assign this line to Rosamond herself, but nor is it any more possible to say it is definitely *not* her, either. Rosamond and the narrator in this moment are in the unique position of taking up the same story while retaining, due to Rosamond's unsympathetic nature, an intractable divide between their perspectives that is increasingly impossible to determine the boundary of. We as readers are forced into a hyper-awareness of how they coexist as separate entities *because* of these moments where they appear to coalesce into one. They are both inseparable and totally separate. We know that the boundary between character and narrator exists but can no longer identify where it is, how it looks, or what it will act like. In other words, Rosamond both retains her separation from the story *and* makes it impossible for us to extricate her from it. That fact is what makes it possible for "[t]he town's talk," as she calls it, to be both "of very little consequence" and inwardly gratifying to her (*MM* 296), since she is able to decide whether or not to identify with and perpetuate whatever ideas and minds are most advantageous to the survival of her own sense

of self. This security in her distance from others and in her sense of self is what ultimately allows the immediate crisis of identification between narrator, character, and readers to pass, and the rest of the chapter (and the matter concerning the engagement itself) settles into relatively straightforward and secure depictions of Rosamond and descriptions of her inner thought that are secure. They are secure not because they have disarmed alternative perspectives like Rosamond's but because they have, at least for now, appeased them, which we see in the way that Rosamond persists in the narrator's observation that she "meant to live as she pleased" (*MM* 297) and in their use of gentle adverbs that details how she happily avoids thoughts of "committing any desperate act" in Lydgate's absence by plaiting her hair "as beautifully as usual" and keeping herself "proudly calm" (*MM* 300).

When Lydgate does return, as he must, the tentative connection that Rosamond and the narrator had between themselves is transferred between him and her instead, a relationship which combines sympathy's dual impulses of attraction to and distance from another person in instances where the narrator alone did not or even could not do so. It is a fraught attraction, surely, but that is exactly what is necessary. Nothing else would allow Lydgate to blush alongside Rosamond in embarrassment or to share the awkward silence with her after accidently causing offense (*MM* 300-01.) Nothing else would let us know these responses at the same time as we sense Rosamond's own emotional struggles between "mortification and the wish not to betray it" (*MM* 301), which make her fatefully drop her chain-work. Indeed, it is the moment when Lydgate grabs that chain and rises to find his expectations for Rosamond irrevocably disrupted that any kind of sympathetic understanding between them is possible at all. He expects to see her "lovely little face set on a fair long neck which he had been used to see turning under the most . . . self-contented grace" but sees instead "a certain helpless quivering which touched

him quite newly, and made him look at Rosamond with a questioning flash" (*MM* 301), a questioning flash of his own perceptions rather than of Rosamond herself. And although he doesn't understand the full import of her "natural" state, unaware it contains just as much the stubbornness of childhood as its innocent beauty, "[t]hat moment of naturalness" was still "the crystallizing feather-touch: it shook flirtation into love" (*MM* 301) because Lydgate for the first time is aware of what he doesn't and can't know about her. Falling in love, it seems, requires its own kind of selfishness, and it is only by retreating back into Lydgate's own beliefs that, "this sweet young creature depended on him for her joy" (*MM* 301) that they actually are able to come to some kind of connection. As our narrator says, it may be "a strange way of arriving at an understanding, but it was a short way" (*MM* 301), and it is moreover the most dependable, even if unconventional, method of love and sympathy for another that we've seen thus far. Under Rosamond's influence, we see most concretely how necessary it is to embrace the strange relationship between tension and sympathy in order to connect to people, and to embrace the fraught nature of that connection, as well. The effect within *Middlemarch*, of course, is that Lydgate leaves the house "an engaged man, whose soul was not his own, but the woman's to whom he had bound himself" (*MM* 303) – bound because that is what Eliot has shown us to be necessary both narratively and ideologically. And as Lydgate and Rosamond demonstrate in this moment, we ourselves must love and sympathize with other people, reckoning with them on their own terms, even when it is difficult because there is quite literally no better option if we hope to engage seriously with and enact any kind of sympathy.

Having said that, Rosamond's and Lydgate's relationship alone is certainly not the be-all and end-all of sympathy within *Middlemarch*, or even in reference to Rosamond herself. Given *Middlemarch*'s insistence on the inherent interconnectedness of various human lives and

communities, it is more than possible to discuss the importance of the marriage plot and the domestic sphere within Eliot's ideology of sympathy while still giving other kinds of social interactions and relationships their fair dues. In particular, I want to spend the last few pages of this chapter focusing on the relationship[13] between Rosamond and Dorothea Brooke, with the latter usually considered the more critically interesting of the two given her role as one of the novel's two primary protagonists alongside Lydgate and given the general strength of her moral character. Dorothea has so far been outside the scope of this thesis firstly because, as I mentioned above, anything I could add to the critical landscape surrounding her would be hardly relevant at best and redundant at worst given the wealth of other more rigorous analyses, and secondly because addressing the ways in which she helps develop *Middlemarch*'s collective and overarching ideology of sympathy in the same detail as I consider Rosamond would be a thesis in its own right. With that said, I think turning now to the moments in which their perspectives and sympathies collide and irrevocably reshape those of the other, and in particular to the famous scene near the novel's end in which Rosamond admits the truth to Dorothea about her relationship to Ladislaw (namely, that there never was one to begin with), provides us the most poignant model through which to consider how even Rosamond's intensely internalized and individually-focused sympathetic process can be integrated into Eliot's larger, complete whole.

To indulge in a minor but important digression, I would argue this scene's sympathetic implications are further complicated by its biographical history and the way in which that history has been relayed to us in the present. After the death of George Henry Lewes in 1879, Eliot married John Cross in 1880. He was the first to attempt to collect her letters and journals into a

[13] I stick to this vague label of simply "relationship" rather than, say, friendship, because it seems inexcusably reductive and even patronizing to assume that two women must be either be the best of friends or outright rivals when their actual interactions are far more nuanced in terms of respect and sympathy for each other.

cohesive form after her own death, ultimately producing the three-volume *George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals* (1885), or *Life of George Eliot* for short. Henry argues that Cross himself was aware of the inherent subjectivity of his work and was, in many ways, attempting to relay the persona of George Eliot rather than her objective history (16). Keeping this history of Cross's book in mind is important when we consider Cross's attestation that Eliot:

> . . . told me that, in all that she considered her best writing, there was a "not herself," which took possession of her, and that she felt her own personality to be merely the instrument through which this spirit, as it were, was acting. Particularly she dwelt on this in regard to the scene in *Middlemarch* between Dorothea and Rosamond, saying that, although she always knew that they had, sooner or later, to come together, she kept the idea resolutely out of her mind until Dorothea was in Rosamond's drawing-room. Then, abandoning herself to the inspiration of the moment, she wrote the whole scene exactly as it stands . . . feeling herself entirely possessed by the feelings of the two women. Of all the characters she had attempted she found Rosamond's the most difficult to sustain. (Cross 306)

Now, it must needs be remarked that his statement here about the scene being entirely unedited is (if the British Library's interpretation of Jerome Beaty's *Middlemarch From Notebook to Novel* is to be believed) possibly an exaggeration, since the Library's website paraphrases Beaty as stating that the scene was actually "extensively revised to make Rosamond's confession consistent with her character" ("Manuscript of *Middlemarch*," *British Library*). However, I think Cross adequately defends himself immediately after this passage in saying that "I am only putting down some of my own personal impressions or recollections, which must be taken for what they are worth" (Cross 307), and therefore will dwell more on the statement's emotional

appeal than its truthfulness or lack thereof. It is important to emphasize Eliot's feeling that someone "not herself" inspired and even was responsible for writing her characters, since it reinforces the previous discussion about placing oneself at a metaphorical distance to enact (and actively create in Eliot's case) sympathy for others. Given Eliot's general disdain for the tenets of spiritualism, it seems safe to assume this is merely an illustrative figure of speech, but the fact remains that Eliot placed the very foundations of her sympathetic process in this scene and in particular in the two characters whose minds she felt so strongly as separate from her own that those like Cross could only communicate their nevertheless palpable presence as a kind of "possession," a more contentious and more productive form, perhaps, of the cohabitation we saw earlier. This drawing room scene, then, holds the key for understanding not only Rosamond's and Dorothea's growing sense of sympathy for each other but also for understanding how it is that we feel Eliot's presence in her own novel precisely when she distances herself from it and foregrounds her characters instead. Ironically, then, her emphasis on the intimate drawing room setting and on the even more intimate lives of each of the women within it reveals the very opposite. Between the collectivity of readers, Eliot herself, and our two characters under consideration, this room of our literary space with all its feminine accoutrements is getting quite crowded – threatening (or promising, depending on one's perspective) to force us out into the open and force us to contend with both the uncomfortable limitations and possibilities of sympathy in a more public, externalized, and actionable way than Rosamond's conflict with the text and the text's conflict with Rosamond could have on their own.[14]

[14] I maintain, however, that those very internalized and psychic conflicts were the necessary foundation to get us to this point of the argument. Eliot's language of "possession" would have a far more abstract and weak force if we did not yet know how exactly these characters appeared, functioned, and made themselves known in the text itself.

Interestingly enough for a character like Dorothea, who is far more frequently assumed to cast astute glances into others' states of mind and to cleave closer to conventional readings of Eliot's sympathy than other characters, the drawing room scene actually has its basis in her misunderstanding her own intentions as well as those of others. As Dorothea makes her way to visit Rosamond, Eliot tells us she is thinking instead of the impossibility of Will and herself "ever coming into nearer union, and yet she had taken no posture of renunciation," hardly characteristic of our modern Saint Theresa. She even figures "[t]his habitual state of feeling" about him into "a sort of background against which she saw Rosamond's figure presented to her without hindrances to her interest and compassion" (*MM* 773) instead of considering Rosamond on her own terms. It is little wonder under these conditions that she then enters to see Will and Rosamond holding hands "in the terrible illumination of a certainty which filled up all outlines" (*MM* 775), which is indeed not certain at all. This inciting incident ends with Dorothea believing Will does not love her, Will believing Dorothea does not love him, and Rosamond's very sense of self shattered by Will rebuking her and by the realization that not "imagining other people's states of mind except as a material cut into shape by her own wishes" (*MM* 777) is no longer a viable way to gain the attention, love, and sympathy she needs. When Dorothea decides to return in another mistaken but well-intentioned attempt to "save" Rosamond (*MM* 790) from a situation that is not actually as she imagined it, we see perhaps one of the first mostly unproblematic instances of free indirect discourse with regard to Rosamond in the novel, with her gravely wondering, "Why had Mrs. Casaubon come again?" (*MM* 792). I say "mostly" unproblematic because, while this moment actually appears to conform to the conventions of a merged voice between narrator and character not seen elsewhere, it still relies on destabilizing that connection in subtle ways – namely, that Eliot's narrator is well aware of why Dorothea is coming again,

since the reader has just been informed about her reason in the immediately preceding chapter. And yet, that knowledge is still totally unavailable to Rosamond herself despite her clear attachment to the narrative voice. It is an ironically isolating moment, all the more poignant for the fact that readers and Lydgate alike are all implicated in Rosamond's textual isolation without knowing about it. Even returning to Rosamond's direct thoughts is uncertain, with the narrator informing us that the answer to both their own and Rosamond's question "was a blank which Rosamond could only fill up with dread" (*MM* 792), totally lacking the confidence in her ability to direct the plot and those around her which was her defining characteristic before. In disconnecting both Rosamond and Dorothea so thoroughly from their previous means of sympathetic understanding, Eliot increasingly demonstrates that, while they have retained enough of their discrete individuality and alterity to be *capable* of sympathy in and of themselves, actually taking control of it to integrate oneself back into a broader sympathetic community requires reconsidering one's sense of an exclusive self-possession and is dependent on recognizing and reckoning with others' equal ability to define themselves and their impulses to define others. In an increasingly expected way, sympathy is now both more conflicting and more mutually respectful and beneficial than ever before.

We see this recognition and reckoning very directly in Rosamond's and Dorothea's meeting itself. When Dorothea first takes Rosamond's hand, the narrator tells us that Rosamond immediately feels doubt "of her own prepossessions" to remain removed and that Dorothea herself "had counted a little too much on her own strength" to remain calm. She holds back tears at the expense of having emotion pass "over her face like the spirit of a sob" – the first moment when they both realize (though Rosamond is the one to think it to herself) that the other's state of mind "must be something quite different from what she had imagined" (*MM* 793). We see in this

moment very directly how the all-important alterity established by Hetty and bolstered by Rosamond now becomes enacted between and among people, rather than just in one's own mind. Neither Rosamond nor Dorothea entirely lets go of her own discrete self-images or identities (including the assumption that one *can* still know something definitively about the other), but both are suddenly aware that the self-image and identity of the other is, perhaps paradoxically, both more dependent on and separate from their own than previously imagined. The happiness of both of them relies on reaching some kind of understanding, and yet both start to realize that such understanding can only arise from seeing they were wrong about the other to begin with. This is hardly an unproblematic beginning, however, with Dorothea's first comments about Lydgate making Rosamond both newly endeared to her and more assured that "Mrs. Casaubon had the facts in her mind, but she was not going to speak of anything connected to them . . ." (*MM* 794), which, as we soon see, were quite exactly Dorothea's intentions from the beginning. Indeed, even as Dorothea continues to speak, pleadingly asking Rosamond, "How can we live and think that any one has trouble – piercing trouble – and we could help them, and never try?", she knows that she is actually "speaking from out the heart of her own trial to Rosamond's" (*MM* 795) rather than from any unmediated or unbiased understanding of Rosamond's situation. She is correct in assuming that this moment "might be a turning-point in three lives" (*MM* 795), but not for the reasons she imagines. Rosamond's sobs are not because she is under "the misery of false incompatible bonds," as Dorothea interprets it, but because "she was under the first great shock that had shattered her dream-world in which she had been easily confident of herself and critical of others . . ." (*MM* 796). Dorothea's own self-possession is broken down at the same time as the sense of pride between them is. When Dorothea speaks again, she does so not with any sense of "gathering firmness" (*MM* 794) or "self-forgetful ardour" (*MM* 795) as before but with a

"gathering tremor" and "palpitating anxiety" that make her aware of the limits of her own thoughts about Rosamond. She dreads "presuming too far, and of speaking as if she herself were perfection addressing error" and yet is "too much preoccupied with her own anxiety, to be aware that Rosamond was trembling too . . ." (*MM* 797).

These mutual breakdowns in their assumptions about the other and in the cloaking of their real feelings are what finally allows real, actionable sympathy to begin between them – with Rosamond herself taking the first movement of expressing it. Having been "taken hold of by an emotional stronger than her own," demonstrating that she has learned to consider and feel the emotions and lives of others on their own terms as separate entities from herself, Rosamond "could find no words, but involuntarily . . . put her lips to Dorothea's forehand which was very near her, and then for a minute the two women clasped each other as if they had been in a shipwreck" (*MM* 797).[15] It is precisely this moment which allows Rosamond to utter a phrase that seems to me her most poignant – her assured, direct, and emotional appeal to Dorothea: "You are thinking what is not true" (*MM* 798). The critical underlying fact of this line is that Dorothea has not even had the courage to directly relate her purpose for coming, but Rosamond has the sympathetic wherewithal to not only discern that omission but also the assumption about herself that underlies it. Rather than attempting to define what others are thinking for them, Rosamond gives us an astute, matter-of-fact recognition both that she *can* legitimately see what others are thinking when in turn with sympathy in this way *and* that she is finally aware that she can exist and act with reference to others as their sympathetic equal, rather than clinging to imperfect visions of the world that rely only on herself. In the case of Dorothea, Rosamond

[15] Contrast this passage, if you will, to Eliot's earlier analogy about Lydgate and Rosamond. Realizing that she must have heard about his involvement in the Bulstrode scandal, Lydgate considers how the silence between them on the subject is "as if they were both adrift on one piece of wreck and looked away from each other" (*MM* 756).

reasserts her narrative authority not to privilege herself solely because she can, but because she knows she can use it to make them both visible for sympathetic consideration in the first place in situations where social boundaries of propriety and emotion make direct, unproblematic connection impossible. Though Rosamond's ostensible reason for confession is so Will cannot reproach her anymore (*MM* 798), I think she might as well have said so that Dorothea, and the moral compass which the novel aligns her with, cannot reproach her either.

Put simply, Rosamond and Dorothea have integrated their various approaches to sympathy into a common interpretive schema. In showing us the inherent weaknesses of each approach in their interactions with each other, they then complement each other to form a new kind of sympathetic coexistence that, on an ideological level and structural level, mirrors Eliot's own commitment to putting forward such a diversity of perspectives in her characters. If we look at this scene as only reinforcing Dorothea's righteousness, ignoring Rosamond's contributions to the ideology of sympathy and the earnestness with which they now see each other (*MM* 799) for having both their worldviews challenged, we do Dorothea, Rosamond, and Eliot alike a grave disservice in ignoring what a challenging and yet entirely necessary process sympathy is. That Dorothea does not have her own moment of expressing how beautiful or good she finds Rosamond like Rosamond does after having met her, I think is less attributable to that she has not thought about it at all and more that Eliot anticipates our imagined favored connection to Dorothea as readers and uses it, by implying negative space, to force the same kind of sympathetic crisis and introspection as Dorothea experiences on readers – to force us, in other words, to partner Rosamond's own journey to view others outside of herself with our own to consider Rosamond as an individual deserving of sympathy in and of herself. Eliot shows us in Rosamond that it is far better to struggle indefinitely with the coexistence of other minds and to

maintain our own vain flaws in the pursuit of (however imperfectly) interpreting another's life and mind than to never try to understand them on any terms at all. Rather than discrediting Rosamond and her state of mind, then, Eliot reinforces her foundational role in setting the tone for its ideological and narrative intentions. Rosamond reveals like no one else the limits of "fellow-feeling" in ourselves and others and positions those limits as a means of understanding and offers an alternative for the imperfect, often self-interested communities and societies we actually live and think within. Far from threatening the dissolution of Eliot's sympathetic ideal which she so carefully modeled in Hetty, Rosamond is actually the very means by which it is enacted and then perpetuated in the novel as a whole and in ourselves.

IV. *Daniel Deronda* and Gwendolen Harleth: The Limits of Sympathy for Women within "[P]ainted Gilded Prison[s]"[16]

Having discussed so thoroughly the roles Hetty and Rosamond play within their respective novels, we now arrive at Eliot's ultimate novel and, as it is typically argued, a heroine who easily figures as among Eliot's most psychologically complex: Gwendolen Harleth. Indeed, by that metric, I imagine many would balk at the idea that she is like Hetty or Rosamond at all, and even more so at the idea that they are her ideological predecessors as I have argued for and will continue to argue for. To introduce the interpretation that Gwendolen represents a continuation of these previous characters (even if a problematic one) and the interpretation that Gwendolen's complexity of character offers sympathetic insights, we turn to Henry James, the American author roughly contemporary to Eliot who famously both greatly admired and criticized her works in apparently equal measure, shown perhaps most concisely by the fact that James took *Daniel Deronda* (1876) to be the inspiration for his own 1881 novel *The Portrait of a Lady* despite having "considered [it] 'a great failure compared to her other books'" (Daugherty 157). His famously trifurcated critique, entitled "*Daniel Deronda*: A Conversation" (also of 1876) concerns three friends – Theodora, Pulcheria, and Constantius – discussing what they consider to be the novel's greatest successes and failures. By Daugherty's estimation, Constantius in particular is figured as the most naturally "reliable" of the three, owing to his levelheaded and mediating role as the authoritative male reviewer (157), a flattering portrait which it seems fair to assume reflects James's thinly veiled attempt at a self-insertion. While Theodora believes Gwendolen's youth, vanity, and silliness only have a deeper tragic meaning through association with her intelligence and cleverness (James 431), Constantius mostly agrees

[16] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Earl L. Dachslager (Barnes & Noble Books, 2005), p. 519

with her assessment, but further argues that the main tragic mechanism in Gwendolen's life arises from:

> The universe, forcing itself with a slow, inexorable pressure into a narrow, complacent, and yet after all extremely sensitive mind, and making it ache with the pain of the process – that is Gwendolen's story. And it becomes completely characteristic in that her supreme perception of the fact that the world is whirling past her is in the disappointment not of a base, but of an exalted passion. (431)

"Exalted passion" is not a phrase I'm sure anyone has ever used to describe our other characters under consideration, nor the idea of their possessing a kind of "supreme perception" (since even my own assessments of their characterizations hinge on the fact that their views of the world and others are necessarily limited). That "narrow, complacent, and . . . extremely sensitive mind," however, is something I would claim, have claimed, and will claim is the basis of commonality among them, which even the contentious Pulcheria seems to recognize when she identifies Rosamond and Gwendolen as belonging to the same category of "disagreeable wives" who are, indeed, so alike that it proves to her how typical and "common a type the worldly, *pincée*, illiberal young Englishwoman is" (432). Hetty, it should be noted, escapes this conversation entirely, perhaps too poor and plain to fit James' notion that vanity is forgivable and even interesting as long as it and its possessor are beautiful.

I quote this section and refer to James at length here not just because his thoughts on the novel are among the most contemporary to its publication and among the most insightful generally, but also because he elucidates in a very concise though abstract way (vis-à-vis "the universe") how the questions of sympathy and perception established in previous chapters come to be embodied in their most explicitly external and materialistic forms within *Daniel Deronda*.

Whereas Hetty's and Rosamond's psychological conflicts arise when their visions of themselves and of their communities are isolated from material reality, I argue that Gwendolen's own, though equally psychological, primarily originate from the moments in which her self-centered nature is directly forced to contend with the other people inhabiting her world, and in particular their equally outreaching forces of will – a new kind of sympathetic process that the remainder of this chapter will elucidate. This chapter, in a marked departure from its predecessors, now considers how Gwendolen's shift from an unsympathetic female character to a sympathetic one is increasingly found in how her internal conflicts are mirrored in her contentious relationships to people, institutions, and forces outside of herself, rather than being mostly internally contained. Gwendolen herself differs from her predecessors in that she is clearly far from the periphery of our narratological concerns as one of *Daniel Deronda*'s two central protagonists; and so, following that logic, it also makes sense that we must consider the newly central material conditions surrounding and even enveloping her in order to reach a full consideration of the issue at hand. It has not escaped critics' attention, for example, that this is Eliot's only novel that takes place within her contemporary Victorian context and that deals with the thriving urban center of London at all, aglow as it is in the spoils of modernity and colonialism.[17] As such, it is hardly unfounded or unprecedented that we take James's idea of the universe slowly and inexorably working itself into Gwendolen's mind and argue that the process can be and is reversed, with Gwendolen's mind exerting its own influence on the novel through various and uniquely tangible and visible connections to people and objects.

[17] It should be noted, however, that even *Daniel Deronda* has a delayed temporality, if we will, taking place not contemporaneously to the time of its own writing (1876) but roughly ten years prior in mid-1860s, as references to "the American war" (Chap IX, p. 78), among others, suggest.

The basis of my argument lies in the assumption that the development of our sympathy for Gwendolen and of her sympathy for others has its foundations in Eliot's previous novels, in that sympathy similarly relies on her unsympathetic nature to be shaped and actualized, however ultimately externally shaped it is; Gwendolen's conflicts with her external environment, which make sympathy possible for her, arise similarly from the inherently gendered disjunction inherent to her visions of her place in the world, what she thinks the world owes her, and how she is actually treated and received. I now argue further that the means of her influence over the novel's materially complicated version of sympathy stem directly from instances when her psychological conflicts have physical referents and even origins – namely in her relationships (antagonistic or otherwise) to other people and in her navigation of the conditions of marriage and then widowhood. We must equally contend with these external influences if we are to form an adequately complicated view of sympathy in light of the equally complicated social, political and literary institutions that Gwendolen is both able to challenge us to read differently and is increasingly defined and changed by them herself.

This reading is possible because Gwendolen, though perhaps in a not entirely conscious way, combines the dual internalized impulses of Hetty and Rosamond to, respectively, emphasize her own alterity and to place the novel's narrative within her own interpretive schema (though that distance and control is critically also qualified by external forces). She then synthesizes and acts out those impulses in the novel's shared psychic space, making sympathy visible and actionable at the same time as she makes us confront the limits of its actualization in pragmatic, rather than entirely mental, terms for the first time. Rather than being a nihilistic denial of genuine human connection, however, I argue Gwendolen's engagements with sympathy show it only fails when it is bound too closely with the hitherto unchallenged

conventions of the misogynistic (and xenophobic, while we're at it) world that *Daniel Deronda* represents. In Gwendolen and her fraught journey through the modes of human connection available to her, Eliot ultimately arrives at a new and improved means of sympathy that was only made possible by dissolving the structures that she had to contend and struggle with to initially form it at all. In its ultimately open-ended and bittersweet conclusion, *Daniel Deronda* insists upon an increased moral demand to produce and enact sympathy for others in worlds, both that of the novel and of ourselves, precisely because the increasingly complicated forms of inter- and intrapersonal conflict that seemed to preclude it makes it – as well as the genuine ardency and desire to understand others - all the more necessary and possible.

As optimistic as that outcome sounds, the process to arrive there does indeed start with decidedly more pessimistic and, as we'll soon see, antagonistic origins. Each previous chapter ended with discussions of how interpersonal interactions informed sympathy, but we now will take those interpersonal interactions as our beginning, seeing as *Daniel Deronda* as a whole is overtly concerned with how the form of sympathy is shaped by one's place in society and the relations that such a place entails, rather than being shaped in a vacuum. Critically, one's place in society (and therefore the sympathy one is afforded or not afforded) itself only exists insofar as others acknowledge the validity of that place at all, a point I stress because this novel in particular offers countless examples of the breakdown of conventional sympathy that happens when that process of recognition fails. No one forefronts this breakdown in a more succinct and applicable way than Riya Das in her article "An Unsympathetic Network: Female Defiance as Narrative Force in *Daniel Deronda*," which primarily argues that "it is female *antagonism*, rather than cooperation, that drives the plot" (Das 1, emphasis original), with unsympathetic personal desire serving as its female characters' primary means of individual agency (2). Most

importantly for my own points, Das claims this rejection of "the expectation of productive female solidarity" is enacted specifically in response to the conditions of the Victorian marriage plot which Eliot and her contemporaries relied upon so heavily, "where unquestioning solidarity can often be detrimental to the well-being and female characters" and can cause "the political value of antagonism" to be overlooked by critics (3). Das introduces her argument by glancing towards Gwendolen's and Lydia Glasher's first meeting, where Lydia begs Gwendolen to refuse any proposal of marriage that Grandcourt might offer to ensure his continued monetary support of her, as his mistress, and her children. Gwendolen, though "initially impressed by Lydia's dignified appearance,"[18] soon considers herself to be "in an elevated moral and economic position compared to Lydia" (2) and adjusts the displays and extent of her solidarity in response, only agreeing to a passive policy of non-interference rather than to an active endorsement. That this uneasy agreement is doomed to fail seems certain given that, as Das emphasizes, both Lydia and Gwendolen are far from friends at the end of this interaction, and indeed are even more antagonistic and unsympathetic towards each other than they were at the beginning, with each merely "hoping to leverage a more comfortable social position via marriage to the same man" (2). It is only in this respect of having shared motivations, though with competing goals and results, that Gwendolen and Lydia reach anything even remotely approaching an understanding, but that alone is hardly the solidarity or sympathy we might have expected or desired.

The reason for their total breakdown in sympathy at a moment when all its necessary conditions seem to be met (namely, that Lydia and Gwendolen are very clearly trying to establish distance between themselves and emphasize the difference between their circumstances) is clearly just as much, if not more so, a material conflict rather than an emotional one. As Das

[18] And likely impressed by the material wealth and power such a dignified appearance might suggest.

points out, “There is no hug, no tears, no mutual denunciation of Grandcourt . . . . not even an emotional acknowledgement of their common struggles as women” (2) between the two, a fact which represents to me Eliot’s decided break from the conventions of sentimental and arbitrary friendships between women that might serve in other novels by other authors to mollify the uncomfortable facts of female anger and selfishness by assigning the cause of their disagreements to unsavory individuals or emotional misunderstandings rather than to a recognition that the sociopolitical conditions they find themselves in have inherent points of weakness – namely, that women have to compete with others to associate with and marry the right man in order to gain access (but not control) over his wealth and influence by proxy. Female reconciliation, in other words, merely continues to stoke inequity between women, a fact which Eliot seems keen to make us aware of by modeling through Lydia and Gwendolen what the utter lack of it looks like and produces. That this terse and necessarily unsympathetic meeting is motivated by the material realities of their positions as women, especially as those positions are dependent on having exclusive yet limited access to some man’s protection and power rather than to his love, is supported firstly by the fact that Grandcourt as a person seems utterly incapable of feeling love and secondly by the fact that Gwendolen herself has no illusions about the potential marriage’s emotional values and seeks only the material ones which she imagines will benefit her.

This process starts to play out even before Gwendolen meets Lydia, when she spends the morning considering her current courtship with Grandcourt and wistfully figuring herself as “a wood-nymph under the beeches” while rejecting the idea that Grandcourt could complete the image as “an impassioned lyrical Daphnis for the wood-nymph” (*Daniel Deronda* 127). Instead, she pictures him making rather mundane and “slow conversational approaches to a declaration,”

which she would naturally encourage "according to the rational conclusion which she had expressed to her uncle" (127) rather than according to any mythical or romantic ones, showing us how Gwendolen attempts to retain her own sense of independence and self-possession by both emphasizing and distancing herself from the pragmatic realities of the marriage she thinks will secure those for her. We see how Gwendolen's ideology of exclusive self-interest starts to exert itself more clearly when she "merrily" responds to her mother Mrs. Davilow's remark about the middle-aged still having plenty of opportunities for happiness with an insistence that "I must lose no time in the beginning . . . . The sooner I get my palaces and coaches the better." Her mother's prompting to attach "a good husband who adores you" to those palaces is met only with Gwendolen putting out her lips "saucily" and saying nothing (*DD* 127), likely because it represents to her an impossible merging of the means of her desire, the man and the marriage, and the desire itself, her own physical and psychological comfort. Gwendolen wants a secure and comfortable marriage, surely, but the thought that the man who will give that to her might expect some kind of reciprocal emotional availability seems too absurd to consider given that the very foundations of her conceptions of marriage are that it exists only by virtue of the psychical and symbolic distance she retains from others and exists exclusively for her own practical and mental self-preservation.

For those reasons, Gwendolen does not take her mother's advice to heart, instead thinking only of "the reassuring thought that marriage would be the gate into a larger freedom" (*DD* 128), reflecting Das's argument that the patriarchal constraints women face give them only a "limited scope for static considerations of their circumstances, resulting in a diminished capacity for unwavering sympathy . . . . They are able to afford sympathy when nothing is at stake" (Das 6). While it seems mostly inane to try to rewrite Gwendolen's story and imagine

what she would have done under different circumstances given that they aren't, and she can't, be different, I do think it is hardly inconceivable to say that Gwendolen could content herself with simply being adored by others outside the constraints of marriage if she had any way on her own to realize or actualize her visions for her future, seeing that sympathy with another person is clearly not a part of its appeal, and in fact (as I argued) she seems repulsed by the idea that such a connection might be involved. While her comfortable financial circumstances have not yet been challenged, she disdains her mother's encouragement to marry for love, or at the very least to consider it equal to other more appreciable factors, because it does not fit within that "limited scope" for sympathy that Das identified – threatening her unimpressed appraisal of marriage as being primarily the means to validate the lavish lifestyle that she imagines as a given for herself and secondarily the means to avoid a dull spinsterhood, which is disdainful for its resignation and vulgarity rather than emotional loneliness.[19]

All this is to say that Gwendolen's preoccupation with her own self-interest and with marriage as a purely selfish endeavor, one entered into and maintained by thinking of little as the other person as possible and as much about one's own gains as possible, is not the result of some unique moral deficiency in her. Instead, it reflects her broader awareness that women, "who have limited power in all spheres – material, aspirational, and social – cannot afford sympathy. Defiance is the currency they have to spend, and while it helps them negotiate their own desires, it also keeps them at odds with one another" (Das 8). Offering limited or no sympathy at all in these key areas of a woman's life, marriage certainly not excepted, allows women with wildly different circumstances to emphasize their own needs and desires, which, as Das argues,

[19] Though a widow and a mistress rather than a spinster, I would argue Gwendolen feels "revulsion within her" at the sight of Lydia because she assesses her as being partially within this category. As Gwendolen thinks to herself, Lydia represents a "ghastly vision" that says, "'I am a woman's life!'" (*DD* 133) – representing the extreme ends of both a single woman's poverty and of a married woman's utter dependence without the benefits of either.

ultimately results in an "effective female agency" (8) for all that would have been impossible within cooperative female networks. Thus, Gwendolen's lack of sympathy towards or, indeed even interest in, her mother's point of view is explained by the fact that she, having "never had the slightest visitation of painful love" (*DD* 61), can only consider marriage in terms of its pragmatic value and as an inherently unsympathetic condition – and that she considers marriage at all as her only option because of the limits placed on her by her society's expectation for the direction of women's lives. Her subsequent lack of sympathy towards Lydia is also thus explained because Lydia disrupts the possibility of Gwendolen's marriage to Grandcourt from occurring, or at the very least from occurring without any kind of guilt or psychological distress for Gwendolen. They are stuck, as Das again shows, in a zero-sum game. Any attempts at working together would only mean that "neither of them could be happy in any of the possible scenarios . . . . [S]olidarity," or indeed sympathy, "would only prolong their role as vulnerable women in a patriarchal system. Instead of fatalistically embracing their perpetual vulnerability, each woman actively seems to improve her circumstances at the other's expense . . ." (Das 4).

This insight is what allows us to reckon Gwendolen's subsequent defiant exclamation to her mother after meeting Lydia that "I don't care if I never marry any one. There is nothing worth caring for. I believe all men are bad, and I hate them" (135) with her decision after all, especially after her subsequent financial ruin which totally precludes any opportunity to give herself her own desired lifestyle, to accept Grandcourt. She only makes this decision after she has exhausted all the options her "patriarchal system" has determined fitting or even possible for a woman of her social standing, shifting from her initial questions about "whether she should take a particular man as a husband" to bolder ones about "whether she need take a husband at all – whether she could not achieve substantiality for herself and know gratified ambition without

bondage" (*DD* 222). She is worldly and sympathetic enough to know about and imagine the plights of governesses, for example, musing that it is hardly "pleasanter to be looked down on in a bishop's family than in any other" (*DD* 205). This consideration is what prompts her appeal to Herr Klesmer to judge her capacity as an actress or singer, dreams which he quickly shatters (though with only kind intentions) by telling her that "you must not be thinking of celebrity . . . . You would of course earn nothing" (*DD* 226), states of status and payment that are clearly impossible for Gwendolen at that point. With that rejection in mind, and with Grandcourt's return to town and calling on her with a clear purpose in mind, is it any wonder that she directly engages in the kind of moral calculus Das identifies and picks what she imagines as the least degrading option at the expense of sympathy? The narrator's remark that "[w]hatever was consistent with being a lady [Gwendolen] had no scruple about; but from the dim region of what was called disgraceful, wrong, guilty, she shrank with mingled pride and terror . . ." (*DD* 261) leads into a moment of free indirect discourse that offers us a unique look into Gwendolen's own moral and material evaluation of the problem:

> But now – did she know exactly what was the state of the case with regard to Mrs. Glasher and her children? She had given a sort of promise . . . . But would another who married Grandcourt be in fact the decisive obstacle to her wishes, or be doing her and her boy any real injury? Might it not be just as well, nay better, that Grandcourt should marry? For what could not a woman do when she was married, if she knew how to assert herself? Here all was constructive imagination. Gwendolen had about as accurate a conception of marriage . . . as she had of magnetic currents and the law of storms. (*DD* 261).

I quote this section at length, much like with James's passage, because I believe it captures in one of the most concise and poignant ways possible Gwendolen's naivete and future tragedy. Much has been made of her self-assuredness and self-possession, the extent to which she seems utterly unaware that others have needs or desires equal to her own, but I would argue much less has been made of Gwendolen's genuine attempts to do and reckon with the concept of the good even before she really meets Deronda simply because it does not look like what her society and we as modern readers demand "good" to look like. The narrator's remark that Gwendolen reacts to guilt and shame with "mingled pride and terror" serves an interesting dual role in that it emphasizes and obscures both at the same time, making it clear that both are codependent on and yet impossible to extricate from each other[20] – an extrication that (as Rosamond showed us earlier) is made more difficult with the unintuitive distancing effect of free indirect discourse.

Though it is tempting to read Gwendolen here as giving in to her haughty pride, her quick and almost frantic succession of questions to herself establishes doubt about our ability to read her and a clear sense of her fear, a fear which I would argue is not for Lydia *per se* but for Gwendolen's sudden realization that, though single under different circumstances, there is little in the way of social or material supports that will keep her from becoming exactly like her and being unable to help at all – except, as Gwendolen discerns, the marriage which is the source of her shame and guilt itself. The whole scene presses down with an increasingly sense of futility of her actions as a woman – giving her final statement about the power of a married woman and the narrator's return in directly telling us Gwendolen really had no idea what she was talking about tragic and suffocating rather than scornful airs. Whether or not Gwendolen truly has no other

[20] I use "codependent" here with both deliberateness and slight hesitance, since Gwendolen's marked shift towards attempts at compassion in the novel's latter half suggests both that her capacity for sympathy is not solely and irrevocably defined by her vanity and pride and yet is inextricably interlinked with it. They are not entirely the same, but neither can they be separated from each other.

options is not the point, but that she thinks she doesn't very definitely is, since it was a systemic rather than personal failure that meant she had no sympathetic language with which to consider her options, let alone the most optimal options for both herself and others. While Gwendolen's inclinations towards her own self-interest and self-possession certainly provided the impetus for her decision, the "if" in her condition "if she knew how to assert herself" ironically comes to portend the absolute sense that she will try, and ultimately fail, to assert herself and her sense of agency as she intends, trapped as she is in the all-encompassing patriarchal conventions of marriage and society in general that, much like the process of sympathy itself, as far more tumultuous and uncertain than she could have prepared for while stuck under their influence – especially when they are as incomprehensible and implacable, and thus apparently indisputable, as the seas and storms themselves. Gwendolen may have chosen wrongly in our own estimation in her particular marriage, but the choice of marriage (or sympathy) itself was hardly hers to make within this ideological framework. In Gwendolen, Eliot has irrevocably linked the limits of sympathy to the limits of the social climate around them both. Gwendolen's fraught relationship with the forms of sympathy available to her represents Eliot's own attempts to fashion new and improved versions of sympathy which are only made possible by challenging the structures they had to contend with and rely upon to be formed at all. While sympathy may not be enough to literally dismantle the patriarchal or misogynistic structures of power surrounding Gwendolen and Eliot alike, it *is* enough to subvert them within the novel in an impossible to ignore and irrevocable way.

Ironically enough, the way in which Eliot puts forward this new, impossible to ignore kind of sympathy is by giving Gwendolen the power to enact it once she is a widow – a position which has often served as both historical and literary shorthand for women on the outer margins

of typical social and political life. For Gwendolen and Lydia, the specifics of their lives after marriage varied, of course, as we see in the fact that Lydia was reduced to being a "kept woman" after the death of her husband while Gwendolen's own widowhood frees her from Grandcourt's abuse and her own guilt. Comparing the two, however, will not be the aim of the last section of this chapter. Instead, we look at Gwendolen herself, since a great deal of her emotional and sympathetic development occurs not just subsequent to but *because* of Grandcourt's death and her new status. Further still, even her increasing reliance on and relationship to Deronda after the fact, though it is mostly one-sided, reflects the ways in which she challenges her attachments to the status quo. He is connected to the privileges of English nobility and masculinity through Sir Hugo and yet also first assumed to be a bastard and then secondly confirmed to be a Jew, making association with him an inherently productive means of subverting the status quo from within.[21] Catherine A. Civello's article, entitled "The Ironies of Widowhood: Displacement of Marriage in the Fiction of George Eliot," is of particular interest here, as she argues that Eliot's heroines gain both a new "promise of happiness and productivity" and also "a renewed sense of agency" in their widowhoods, ultimately unsettling "Victorian expectations" with a particularly "feminist irony that disrupts both cultural and literary idealizations" for women within and outside of fiction (Civello 1). Unlike other critics we've encountered thus far, Civello accepts Eliot as a feminist author without much hesitation, principally because she readily destabilizes the social and literary conventions of marriage within her novels, placing her "at odds with Victorina cultural assumptions," presumably assumptions of patriarchy (1). For Gwendolen in particular, Grandcourt's drowning does not represent either emotional or material poverty but indeed "catalyzes [her] to assume responsibility for her actions, as she changes not so much her way of

[21] Since his multitude of conflicting identities have allowed him to subvert it himself already.

life as her frame of mind" (1). She is more like Dorothea in this respect than might have previously been imagined, by all accounts becoming a more moral and sympathetic person once outside of the bonds of what was supposed to be a supportive marriage than she was inside of it.

This improved position is, of course, most immediately attributable to the fact that Grandcourt is unequivocally among the cruelest of Eliot's characters, so dedicated to controlling Gwendolen that, within mere weeks of their marriage, the thought of defying him is as impossible as defying "the texture of her nerves and the palpitations of her heart" (*DD* 396). Yet, he does not control all of her, and even the control he does have has its limits; it is hard to garner a wife's submission, after all, if you are quite dead. Most notably, even at his most controlling and choking, Grandcourt seemingly has no idea what Gwendolen is actually thinking besides what he knows she must factually know. "He conceived," for instance, "that she did not love him" and is content to think love not very necessary (*DD* 588). What he can never conceive, however, is that Gwendolen's revulsion to him has a moral force and that "there may be," or indeed that there is, "a resentment and disgust which will gradually make beauty more detestable than ugliness, through exasperation at that outward virtue in which hateful things can flaunt themselves . . ." (*DD* 589). All this is to say that Gwendolen, as she sets off on the fateful boat journey which will inadvertently give her exactly what she wants, is far more self-possessed and redeemable than her actual position suggests, precisely because she has kept "her impassible air" on the surface while her imagination of a life beyond Grandcourt remains "obstinately at work." She is not afraid of him but "of her own wishes, which were taking shapes possible and impossible" and which culminate in visions and "plans of evil that would come again and seize her in the night, like furies preparing the deed that they would straightway avenge" (*DD* 598). This passage serves two important functions. First, it shows that even within her marriage

Gwendolen is far more moral and sympathetic in her own right than she might appear, acknowledging her failings in a way that aligns her with more conventional forms of sympathy while also sustaining intrapersonal conflicts that invoke sympathy's alternative forms. Secondly, her fear that her evil thoughts (namely of killing Grandcourt) will take control of her "like furies" is a direct reference to the evening of their wedding, when Grandcourt finds Gwendolen "pallid, shrieking as it seemed with terror," with the jewels that used to belong to Lydia and that are now Gwendolen's, "scattered around her on the floor . . . . In some form or another the Furies had crossed his threshold" (*DD* 315). When considering these two passages together, it becomes increasingly clearer that Gwendolen is not the one being punished, but Grandcourt himself – and indeed that Gwendolen, though subconsciously, is the very "fury" who punishes Grandcourt and avenges herself for her mistreatment. Her premonition of evil, her terror, and even her hatred are all merely more intense and productive forms of the antagonism we saw previously. They are more productive not merely (or even primarily) because Gwendolen has been attempting to rid herself of the symbols and agents of her oppression, but because that oppression itself is self-destructive and cannot stand under the weight of any amount of scrutiny to its institutions (i.e., marriage) or to its conventional means of relating to and understanding other people. Gwendolen, in all her suppressed revulsion and violence, simply calls to account the broken system that created Grandcourt and stifled her chances of sympathy in the first place. As Civello stipulates, Eliot "articulate[s] a culturally constructed irony" (2), demonstrating very acutely how any person, any institution, any society this limiting of and unsympathetic towards women will always crush itself under its own weight. Seen in this light, Gwendolen's choice not to jump into the water until it is far too late, her choice to widow herself rather than *be* widowed, as it were,

seems less like Gwendolen condemning herself and more like an inevitable – and indeed definitionally sympathetic – kind of mercy killing.

Unlike Grandcourt, however, the society which generated him, and which Gwendolen now has to navigate on her own, is far more resistant to dying any kind of quiet death. And, having said that, it does not seem entirely clear that that outcome is even what Eliot condones. As Civello argues, Eliot articulates marriage as an "indignity" to decenter the masculine subject, not to necessarily destroy him entirely[22] but instead to call into question conventionally acceptable extensions of power over women's voices and even minds. By locating "the source of that power in the realm of cruelty," Eliot shows how it exceeds "the bounds of acceptable social practice" (6) and must be tempered within the context of women, like Gwendolen, who find themselves increasingly setting the emotional and sympathetic terms for their communities by exploiting the marginal (and yet independently powerful) status widowhood gives them. Gwendolen almost immediately is able to confide her "moral ambiguity," as Civello calls it, to Deronda once independent. Indeed, "the narcissism that had enraged her husband vanishes at his death" (6), further proof that it was Gwendolen's conflicts with her misogynistic surroundings and not Gwendolen by herself that pushed rather innocent vanity and selfishness into an arrogant lack of sympathy for others. Now that that influence is gone, she is able to take "responsibility for her actions" and exercise power, "albeit over herself, that she never could as a wife" (7). Perhaps the most immediately obvious way this newfound power is expressed, and by "immediately" I mean quite literally mere minutes after Grandcourt's death, is in how Gwendolen and Deronda finally seem to be able to communicate and sympathize with each other on some subliminal level. As Deronda watches Gwendolen be rowed back to shore, he thinks

[22] "Him," here, of course refers not to any specific man but to the general concept of a masculine voice. Eliot's point in elevating these female voices is to return the focus they were always owed, not to destroy other voices entirely.

that "the strokes of the oars as he watched them were divided by swift visions of events, possible and impossible . . ." (*DD* 602), the latter clause being an exact match to Gwendolen's conception of her own thoughts only pages earlier.

Rather than representing some impossible kind of merging between their perspectives, what this similarity implies is that Gwendolen is regaining her power to be heard within the text, reasserting herself as an entity separate from men who has the wherewithal to perceive and define herself and her actions on her own terms rather than on theirs. Though she does not have the same confidence in her "narrator" status as Rosamond does, Eliot maintains the use of Gwendolen's language throughout the novel even when she herself is not present as a means of emphasizing both her resilience and endurance. Gwendolen may have to take different roles and forms to survive, maiden to wife to widow in quick succession, but she persists nonetheless; indeed, she persists so well that even characters like Deronda notice and express their awareness of her influence in surprisingly astute ways. He notices how Gwendolen makes him promise to see her again with both a respectful perfect quietness and a "repressed eagerness," and wonders to himself while waiting for her to wake the next morning "at the force that dwelt in this creature, so alive to dread; for he had an irresistible impression that . . . she was mastering herself with a determination of concealment" (*DD* 603) – a concealment not only of her emotions from other people but a concealment of herself within the text itself, subtly regaining agency over both her material and textual circumstances. At the same time, she pushes further into the conflicts that make sympathy possible for her, withholding parts of herself and her story even in her confession to Deronda, at least at first, as she establishes her new narrative authority as a truly independent woman. While her question to Deronda "You know I am a guilty woman?" on some level likely is Gwendolen's expression of a genuine belief in her own culpability, it is also

strongly rhetorical, especially when combined with her simple statement that "He is dead" that seems purposefully incomplete by omission. The result is that Gwendolen forces Deronda into conflict with her and her emotions, and thus forces him into a new sympathetic position with her, as seen directly in the narrator's appeal to "imagine the conflict of feeling that kept him silent" while listening to Gwendolen, with her "bent on confession" and him dreading to hear it because of his own fear that the weight of her soul will be "upon his own with imploring dependence" (*DD* 605).

What Deronda does not recognize in this moment, because of his wavering reliance on male ways of knowing as opposed to the subversive and ironic ways of knowing that Eliot's female characters have (Civello 7), is that this confession is the very means by which Gwendolen actually becomes narratively independent – by forcing emotional conflict in this way she reasserts the multifaceted aspects of her new life, both materially (as a widow) and morally. Of course, in other ways that shouldn't be ignored Gwendolen is still dependent on Deronda. She struggles with feeling like her new existence seems "inseparable from Deronda" and with feeling a hope that he would "make his presence permanent" despite never thinking to herself "that he loved her and would cling to her – a thought that would have tottered with improbability" (*DD* 675) even under her shaping eyes. It is a kind of spiritual dependence that Eliot seems much more willing to allow given that Deronda's reluctance to promise not to forsake her despite not yet knowing what her guilt actually is comes to signify Gwendolen's belief in tenderness from men that can provide "inexhaustible patience and constancy" (*DD* 606) to her to forge her own life rather than suffering as before. Gwendolen does not form an unproblematic connection here, surely, nor one that meets our modern expectations for feminist thought, but I would argue it was never intended to be, as Eliot is much more in the business of showing how people,

communities, and entire societies can get better by degrees when ordinary people struggle with themselves rather than in the business of shaping impossible utopias where women are all unmarried and "unmoved by the world's expectations" for them (Civello 7), whether those women are contained within narratological spaces or existing in the complicated, interconnected, and indeed even interdependent world.

All of this is to say that we should not fault Gwendolen too much for needing some human guide like Deronda outside of herself to direct her course at first, especially when he has a unique awareness of the vulnerability of her position and state of mind and of his own anxieties about unduly influencing her. In this light, his reassurance to her that "You can, you will, be among the best of women, such as make others glad that they were born" (*DD* 674) serves as a kind of throughway, connecting her life as a widow both to the increased capacity to enact her sympathy that previously had no outlet and to increasingly legitimized forms of effecting change within her community. She is certainly working to become a more moral person by conforming to some degree to conventional social standards of what that means, but Deronda delivering the message to her gives it an increased force of purposeful subversion rather than mere compliance given his own position. Ultimately, however, it is Gwendolen herself who is, when faced with the reality that Deronda is likely leaving her forever, left feeling for the first time "the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world, and getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving," and who merges the "troubles of her wifehood and widowhood" and their impressions "that whatever surrounded her was somehow specially for her" (*DD* 704-05) with her new desire to live and act better, shaping the world and text around her in turn. If Gwendolen feels the world's influence on her life, figuring it as no longer small and isolated,

then it follows that her famous lines "I shall live. I mean to live" and "I shall live. I shall be better" (*DD* 707) reflect an equal understanding on her part of her increased narrative power to sympathetically shape, turning to metaphor, the story of both her and her world's future, even if (as she tells Deronda) she does "not yet see how that can be" (*DD* 709).

The most important element of all these lines is that they signal both Gwendolen's and Eliot's focus on the future as a site of increasingly complicated moral and social reckonings. *Daniel Deronda*'s ending has long been noted for its relative abruptness and even sense of incompleteness (even if not actually incomplete). Though the epilogues of *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch* have their own tinges of bittersweetness in several respects, they nonetheless have a tinge of finality that seems to be both a product and reinforcement of their historic settings and relatively stable social orders, even if the sympathy underneath is not as stable as it appears. Adam and Dinah are married at last; Hetty is dead. Mary and Fred are content; Rosamond leads the life she had always imagined after Lydgate's death and never forgets Dorothea's generosity "which had come to her aid in the sharpest crisis of her life (*MM* 835); and Dorothea herself, despite never achieving her youthful dreams, is solemnly memorialized as having an "incalculably diffusive" effect on the "growing good of the world [that] is partly dependent on unhistoric acts" (*MM* 838) like hers. Gwendolen, however, does not receive this standard reconciliation of her values and actions with the world's. Indeed, even Deronda's and Mirah's planned journey to the "East" is not undertaken within the scope of the novel, only Ezra's death.

The way in which this stagnation and sense of limbo both gestures towards and uneasily separates itself from the future signals Eliot's ambivalence about providing specific guidelines for how and why we must live. Gwendolen, though aided by her relationships to others, ultimately has both the power *and* responsibility to shape her own future and sympathetic visions

– and in her refusal to show us anything except Gwendolen's acknowledgement of those facts, Eliot turns Gwendolen's statement that she intends to live and be better into a moral imperative, no matter how slowly or haltingly those changes and conflicts must be reckoned with. How she intends to live, and how she intends to shape the world she lives within, is entirely up to her, outside of our senses and thus our judgement. Framed like this, Eliot's decision to place *Daniel Deronda* within what is essentially her contemporary time makes it increasingly clear that Gwendolen's moral imperative is indeed becoming our own, and that Gwendolen's entire "present" we have been shown and allowed briefly to inhabit throughout the novel is only the beginning of our own future. The novel, and Gwendolen's story as a microcosm of it, ends as it does with only vague sympathetic promises to do and be better because, as Eliot famously wrote in "In Which the Story Pauses a Little" of *Adam Bede*:

> I would not, even if I had the choice . . . create a world so much better than this . . . that you would be likely to turn a harder, colder eye on the dusty streets and common green fields – on the real breathing men and women, who can be chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by your fellow-feeling, your forbearance, your outspoken, brave justice. (*AB* 194)

Within this broader philosophy, the at least partial intention of *Daniel Deronda* is to show readers their world exactly as it is, both its material and emotional crises. If we expect the novel to end in some satisfactory way, with little call to action, we have misunderstood Eliot's purpose, and misread her clear directive to make our own moral and sympathetic choices within the world she has depicted – the very world of her readers. Real communities and human lives, in an unfortunate dissimilarity from novels, do not have clear or preestablished answers to the equally

difficult and necessary challenges that they face. Eliot keeps the reality of the novel and its incompleteness in a steady, productive tension, allowing readers to relate enough to it to see our own moral and sympathetic duties reflected there while also emphasizing that we still must attempt to look past the novel itself and extrapolate what our own actions should and must be from it. By limiting our connection with the novel in this way and by emphasizing the necessity of engaging in this kind of uncertain work, Eliot actually provides an optimistic vision of our capacity for quiet yet palpable personal and societal reforms that are possible precisely because they reflect a continuation of the sympathy for others that people have always had, even if it (as Gwendolen's story reaffirms) it was sometimes necessary to extract and render that sympathy under uncomfortable and conflicting circumstances and terms. If we learn anything from *Deronda* and from Gwendolen, it is that both the possibilities for and our duties to undertake sympathy towards others are infinite, and that reconciliations between and amongst people are never a given but must always be attempted, nonetheless. Vanity and selfishness are just as much a part of Eliot's conception of human nature as unconditional love and sympathy are, and neither exists for her without relation to the world and people around oneself. With that in mind, we may leave *Daniel Deronda* not knowing where we must go, but we do certainly know how to get there. By engaging in these ultimately gendered, feminist forms of critique and by exposing the unsuitably of misogynistic systems of power and narrative for sustained sympathy, Eliot has given us a way to reconsider the actions of all her female characters and her entire body of work, and thus the very means by which we can consciously and purposefully shape our treatment of others, our own futures, and our stories for the better.

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Afterword

As this thesis now comes to a close, I think it is important to acknowledge several very real yet also quite inevitable limitations to the conclusions and calls to action presented. There are undoubtedly better turns of phrases that would have more adequately suited my purposes, better quotes that would have been more appropriate for my arguments, better critics and articles to engage with in order to contend more fully with the wealth of scholarship on the topic at hand. However, I also hope to make it clear that I never even assumed, let alone attempted, that I could have created some comprehensive treatise on sympathy within Eliot's novels within the span of this necessarily limited format. Instead, I intended only to elucidate what I consider notable exceptions to the general critical bent that Eliot's sympathy is threatened rather than necessarily complicated by those female characters often deemed unsympathetic, for whatever reasons. Eliot's sympathy does involve selfless beneficence; it does involve some kind of mutually agreed upon connections between and among minds. But that is not all that it is – just as conventionally unsympathetic views of Hetty, Rosamond, and Gwendolen do not fully capture all aspects of their personalities, characters, and import to their respective stories.

I began this project with the belief that my methodology would be almost entirely historical, gleaning Eliot's intentions for her characters through the process of their creation and reception. Instead, I became much more fascinated by the ways in which feminist and narratological concerns could and do converge, leading us to perhaps unexpected but not unwarranted implications about the roles of women of all varying degrees of sympathy within Eliot's fiction – namely, that her female characters created sympathy and narrative authority for themselves precisely in the moments where they seemed denied to them. In a reflection of her own experiences, Eliot created characters who the world disdained in equal measure whether

they were conforming to its expectations for how women should behave and appear or not. While Eliot herself managed to escape this cycle, becoming so independently wealthy via her writing that the world's censure could be merely an emotional pain rather than a material or financial one, she uses these characters to both make us aware of and call us to account for the realities of women who are not successful in that same independence of thought or circumstance, and she hides the means of developing sympathy for them in their conflicts with the people and communities around them to make it impossible to deny it to them. As David says in the afterword to her own book, "The central issue is one of genesis and origins" (David 225), with the only difference between our approaches to that central issue being the topics themselves. While David is concerned with the origins of female intellectualism, if and how women are able to create those identities for themselves, I was interested above all in the question of if and how women were able to create sympathy for themselves and even for others in direct opposition to other conventions of sympathy, and literature itself, which tried to categorically exclude them.

Ultimately, I hope to have convinced anyone reading this thesis that reading characters and ideologies between the lines in this way is not a fruitless or futile exercise, and that even the works of someone as relentlessly studied as George Eliot can give us new insights about her philosophy and intentions even to this day. I chose these characters and these topics because I feel vehemently about viewing the people of the past with all the nuance and respect that we view ourselves through in the present, and with the full recognition that they had the intelligence and emotional wherewithal to consider the questions of sympathy, gender, and power that still grip us to this day. If we fail to recognize how Eliot worked within and systemically challenged the limits of the misogynistic worldview that she found herself in, fail to recognize how she furthered her female characters' causes even within those constrictions, we fail only ourselves.

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Kerri Kilmer was born and raised in Central Texas, graduating from Harker Heights High School in May 2017. She matriculated at the University of Texas at Austin in August of 2017 and will graduate in May of 2021 with a Bachelor of Arts in English with Honors. She has participated in the English Honors Program at UT Austin since the spring of 2019, starting work on this thesis to fulfill the independent research portion of its requisites in the spring of 2020. The same spring, she wrote the research essay entitled "'Girlish Passion and Vanity': Female Anger and Sympathy in George Eliot's Early Novels" under the guidance of Professor Carol MacKay, which received an Honorable Mention in the 2020 School of Undergraduate Studies Writing Flag Award under the Humanities Research category. This essay also won the Parker Literary Criticism Award in the spring of 2021. She won the Rapoport-King Thesis Scholarship in the fall of 2020 for the proposal of this thesis and was then awarded the Burleson Prize for best English Honors thesis in May 2021 after the submission of her completed thesis. Kerri has worked at the Perry-Castañeda Library on campus for the duration of her junior and senior years in Transcription and Captioning Services, providing alternative forms of access to educational materials of many kinds to underserved members of the UT community. After graduation, she hopes to attend graduate school at her alma mater and attain a degree in library science, with a special interest in archives and preservation.